

BILLY-BOY



MARY T. WAGGAMAN



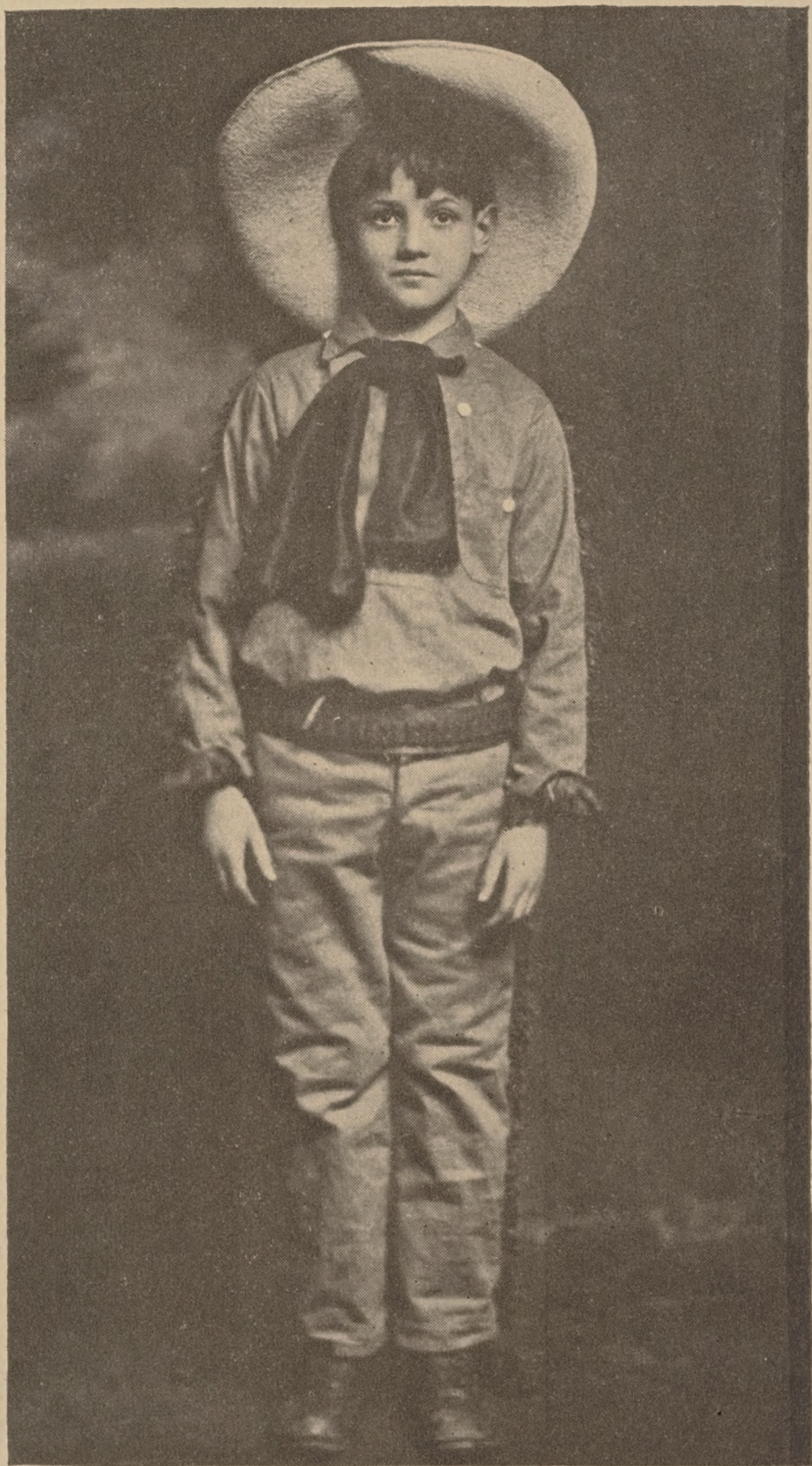
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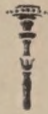


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By MARY T. WAGGAMAN

Author of "The Secret of Pocomoke," etc.



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BILLY-BOY.

I.—MISS CARMEL.

“HURRAY! Whoop, hurray! Miss Carmel! Miss Carmel! Miss C-a-r-m-e-l!” The clear boyish shout swelled in prolonged triumph through the beautiful shading oaks that girdled the quaint old home, on whose vine-wreathed porch Miss Carmel Harrington was entertaining a lingering visitor.

“What a regular war whoop!” said the gentleman, rather indignant at the interruption. “Who is the young savage?”

“It is Billy-Boy,” she answered, with a smile,—“little Billy Dayton. He is not usually so noisy, so there must be something very exciting on his mind.”

There evidently was; for another shout rent the air; and, with a leap over the hydrangeas, a slender boy of twelve landed at Miss Carmel’s feet.

“I’m going, Miss Carmel! I’m going sure and certain! I’m going to-morrow

at six! Ticket is bought. Mother's just packing my trunk. Got my slicker and sweater, and the greatest pair of yellow 'puttees' you ever saw, and three cowboy shirts. It's all right, though mother is scared sick about me. I'm going sure!"

"Going where?" asked the young lady, breathlessly.

"To Colorado—to Bar Cross Ranch—to Jack," replied Billy-Boy, in delighted crescendo. "There's a weak spot in the corner of my lung, the doctor says; and I want latitude or altitude, or something you get in Colorado, to make me expand right. Goodness! I'm glad; aren't you, Miss Carmel?"

"Glad, Bill-Boy?—glad?" she repeated tremulously,—“glad that there is something wrong with your lungs? Oh, no, no, no!”

Mr. Page Ellis, who had risen to take leave, looked rather grimly at this young intruder upon a very pleasant interview.

"Really without claiming medical skill, I feel competent to disagree with any unfavorable diagnosis on this young man's lungs," he said dryly. "They seem decidedly 'all right.'"

"Oh, he did break through the ice last winter and had double pneumonia!" said Miss Carmel, anxiously.

"That was it," agreed Billy. "It was the 'double' business did it. My, but I'm in luck! I never guessed when I was kicking against all that plastering and jacketing last winter that I was in for anything so jolly as this. I don't expand right by two inches, the doctor says,—honest Injun, I don't, Miss Carmel!" affirmed the speaker, catching the smile upon the young lady's face. "Dolly, like a kitty-cat of a girl, said I was 'just fooling' to get out to Jack; but I wasn't at all. Doctor MacVeigh measured me. 'Now swell out for all you're worth, young man,' he said; and I did swell fair and square, and was two inches short. And mother said she had a grandfather or an uncle or somebody that died of consumption, and I shouldn't wait another day, but must go right off to-morrow to Jack. She telegraphed him I was coming, and to lookout for me."

"O Billy dear, they must be anxious about you indeed!" answered the young lady.

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Ellis, who had doubtless reasons of his own for finding Billy-Boy and his affairs most obnoxious just now. "A youngster can't sneeze these days without being pounced upon by a specialist on lung trouble. He is a Dayton, you say?" Mr. Ellis surveyed Billy-Boy's slim, graceful little figure somewhat disapprovingly. "Looks just as Jack did ten years ago. I suppose since then he, too, has 'expanded.'"

Mr. Ellis laughed a not very pleasant laugh; and, shaking hands with Miss Carmel, said he would come again when he could claim less distracted attention.

"I don't like that man; do you, Miss Carmel?" said Billy-Boy, as the late visitor, in no very good humor, strode down the shaded garden path.

"You must not ask such leading questions, Billy," laughed the lady. "And we were a little rude, I'm afraid; but you startled me so with your news. O Billy-Boy, I'll miss you dreadfully,—dreadfully!" she repeated, seating herself on the broad steps of the piazza, while Billy ensconced himself comfortably at her

feet. "I don't know how I shall get on without you."

"Then why don't you come, too?" he said eagerly. "That would be grand. We'd have a crackerjack of a time, Miss Carmel. And, golly! Jack would be glad to see you."

"Do you think he really would, Billy?" There was a queer little catch in Miss Carmel's voice.

"Think! I *know* it!" answered Billy, confidently. "Why, he'd most jump out of his shoes, he'd be so delighted and surprised."

"I rather think he would," said Miss Carmel, with a soft, tremulous little laugh. "But—but I'm afraid I might be very much in the way, and perhaps spoil all your fun."

"Oh, no, you wouldn't!" replied Billy, with decision. "Some girls might, but you're not that kind. Now, I wouldn't have Dolly around a ranch for anything, she is such a fraid-cat. Why, if she saw an Indian or a panther, or anything exciting, she would nearly drop dead. And mother is most as bad. She doesn't even know which end of a gun goes off.

But *you*—you've got 'sand.' I like girls with sand, and so does Jack. You wouldn't mind riding over the mountains, and making coffee and camp fires, and climbing and hunting and fishing."

"Oh, no, Billy-Boy, I shouldn't mind!" And again Miss Carmel laughed that low, tremulous laugh that was like the twitter of a bird. "I'd love it all,—the wide open under the skies and the stars, the heights and the depths, and the free sweep of the mountain wind, and the roar of the mountain storm. But how did you guess I was that kind of a girl, you wise little Billy-Boy! Don't I look tame?"

"No-o-o," answered Billy, with long drawn-out earnestness, "not a bit! Dolly is tame, and Aunt Lou, and Miss van Doran; but you—you're just grand, Miss Carmel! And Jack thinks so, too. He had a picture of you, in your white commencement dress, packed in his trunk. I saw it. I said it wasn't as pretty as you were; and he said, "'Pretty' isn't the word, Billy; try another.' Then I said, 'beautiful,' and he laughed. That was a bit nearer. And I said you were 'just grand, anyhow.' And Jack said I had

struck it right at last. And you are just the grandest girl I know, and Jack is the grandest brother. It has been three years since he went away, but I've never forgotten what a bully brother Jack was. Have you, Miss Carmel?"

"No, I haven't forgotten, Billy," was the low answer.

"Golly, he was great!" continued Billy, hugging his knees, while his brown eyes grew reminiscently soft and tender. "I don't think there ever was a nicer brother than Jack. He used to whirl me out of bed at night, and pitch pillows at me; and sneak me cakes and apples when I was sick and mother wouldn't give me anything but soup. And I'd never have learned to swim if Jack hadn't taken me off to the creek and pitched me in and nearly drowned me. And he stole me off to his room one night and cut off all my curls; he said he wouldn't have the other fellows calling his brother a 'sissy girl.' Mamma and Dolly were mad, you bet! They wouldn't speak to Jack for a week for spoiling my looks. I couldn't wear velvet jackets and lace collars any more after that, but had to be a real boy, and

not little Lord Somebody out of a story-book. My, I was glad; for I hated long curls and lace collars. And, then, the day Joe Slevin took my sled rope, I hollered to Jack, who was coming up the hill, to make Joe give it back to me. And when Joe wouldn't, Jack just looked at us both and said, 'It's an even match, so I can't take a hand. Stand up for yourself, Billy-Boy, and fight it out with Joe.' And I fought for that rope and I got it!"

"I remember," laughed Miss Carmel. "Jack brought you home with a black eye and a bloody nose, that almost sent your poor mother into a fainting fit. I suppose he thought that was the way to make a man of you, Billy."

"Yes," answered Billy. "That was what he said when mamma scolded and cried. 'You don't want to keep Billy a baby forever. Since father is gone, it's up to me to make a man of him.' And when he went away he shook hands hard with me, just like men do," added Billy, proudly; "and he said: 'Don't let them make a mollicoddle of you while I am gone, Billy. Grow up a man.' That's what I

want to do, Miss Carmel,—to grow up a man just like Jack.”

“Don’t be in too great a hurry about it,” said the young lady, softly. “There’s plenty of time. You are very nice as you are, Billy-Boy.”

“Nice!” exclaimed Billy. “I don’t think Jack would want me to be just ‘nice,’ but I am afraid that is all I am. You see, I don’t have any other boys around to fight and tussle with. And mother is sort of scary: I don’t like to worry her and make her head ache; so I play checkers with Aunt Lou at night, and make caramels with Dolly, and read French fables with Miss van Doran, and do all those girlie-girl things that Jack hated. I’m afraid I’m growing up a mollycoddle just like Jack said.” And Billy’s tone sank as he spoke.

“You a mollycoddle!” observed the young lady, warmly. “O Billy-Boy—you dear, true-hearted Billy-Boy,—no, no, no! I’d like to keep you just as you are forever; but I can’t, Billy. You’ll have to grow up, like everybody else, into a big, strong, selfish, forgetful man. But don’t forget too soon. You’ll write to me sometimes,

won't you? You needn't bother about pen and ink: any old pencil scratch will do. Just scribble away and tell me everything. And I'll write back all the home news, and keep my eyes and ears open for everything that you will want to hear. Is that a bargain, Billy-Boy?"

"Yes, you bet it is!" said Billy, eagerly. "I'll have to write carefully to mamma, she worries so about bad spelling; but you won't mind, Miss Carmel?"

"Not a bit. Now I have to go and dress for dinner. But this isn't 'good-bye.' I'll be down to the station to-morrow to see you off."

"All right!" said Billy. "And bring Leo and Towser with you, Miss Carmel. Dogs make things kind of cheerful. They are doing so much crying at home that it's sort of catching. You'd think I was never coming back, to hear Dolly sniffing. It sort of spoils a fellow's fun," added Billy, in an aggrieved tone.

"Of course it does," answered Miss Carmel, sympathetically. "But don't worry. I'll be down to cheer you off."

And cheer was surely needed next evening; for it was a doleful crowd that

gathered around the young traveller at Holmhurst station. There was mamma, tearful and tremulous; and fifteen-year-old Dolly, sobbing openly; Aunt Lou, armed with a vinaigrette for possible faints; and Miss van Doran, a very Cassandra of dismal forebodings. Even Uncle Martin, who was to go as far as New York with Billy, was not the sort of uncle to relieve the situation; but was thin and pale and dyspeptic, and had the general air of a funeral director as he checked Billy's baggage and saw that his ticket was straight through without return.

It took all Billy's pluck to choke down, as Jack's brother should, the lump that would rise in his throat, steady his quivering lips, and wink back the dimness gathering in his eyes. But just as he felt that the breakdown was inevitable, Leo and Towser came leaping and barking in high glee down the road; and behind them Miss Carmel in her prettiest rose-wreathed hat, with a gay little box of homemade "fudge" and a bag of homemade cookies, and a bundle of funny papers tied with red ribbon; and a pocket

kodak, of which no one else had thought, to snap pictures along the way. There were so many beautiful things to be seen, as Miss Carmel declared to mamma; and Billy would enjoy bringing back pictures of them to show to everybody. And it was the loveliest time of year to travel; and Billy was in such luck to have this grand trip, and travelling was "such fun"!

How the sweet chatter chirked up Billy, and steadied his lips, and scattered the mist from his eyes! And when the last dread minute of parting came, and the great train puffed shrieking and clanging up the track, Leo and Towser got up such a diversion, by plunging forward and barking wild defiance at the locomotive, that, in the excitement of keeping them from utter extinction under the cow-catcher, mamma was too frightened to faint, and Aunt Lou dropped her vinaigrette, and Uncle Martin lost his spectacles; and Billy-Boy was somehow torn from the scene by a brakeman, and before he quite knew it was off to join his brother Jack.

II.—A LONG JOURNEY.

It was a long journey: three days and four nights. And, in this twentieth century of ours, a journey that takes three days and four nights means a leap across the map that quite outstrips the jumping genii we used to read about in the Arabian Nights tales.

Uncle Martin was not a cheerful travelling companion; but when he left Billy in New York, after solemnly consigning him to the care of the porter and conductor, the young traveller felt that the last tie was indeed broken; and he watched the bent shoulders and grizzled head disappear in the distance, with an odd little chill in his heart that recalled that other moment when Jack pitched him into the creek to sink or swim six years ago. And if, when he was boxed and curtained in his sleeper that night by the friendly porter, Billy's pillow was damp with boyish tears—well, it didn't matter: there was only his good angel to see.

It was a long journey, indeed, for a fellow who had never been even to boarding-school, and whose pretty room, with its brass bed and ruffled curtains, opened right into mamma's. It was "a mollycoddle's" room, Billy knew; and he would have much preferred a big, raftered attic, like Dick Fealy's, where he could pin up queer bugs and beetles, and have pictures of the football teams on the walls, and a stuffed owl on the mantel. But mamma would not have liked this at all; and, since mamma was his lady and queen, Billy-Boy had loyally submitted to the brass bed and ruffled curtains.

But the pretty home nest seemed very sweet and dear to-night, as he felt himself whirling away through wide, starlit spaces, farther and farther from its tender shelter, farther and farther each moment from mamma's watchful eyes and loving care; and from Dolly, who had suddenly developed into the dearest of sisters; farther from Aunt Lou and Miss van Doran, and dear, darling, lovely Miss Carmel.

Miss Carmel! Somehow, at the remem-

brance of the gay, smiling face under the rose-wreathed hat, Billy's spirits revived. Miss Carmel had thought the trip such fun, and Billy the luckiest fellow in the world to have the chance to go. Miss Carmel had come, laughing, to see him off. If Miss Carmel could see him now—pooh! Billy gouged his brown knuckles grimly into his eyes, and reached for the box of "fudge" he had put under his pillow, took a big, luscious lump of comforting sweetness, and, forgetting his lonesomeness, dropped off at last into a restful sleep.

When he woke next morning and found the sun winking cheerfully in his half-open eyes, and the grinning porter calling him to breakfast, things seemed much more cheerful, and Billy-Boy began to look about him with the wide-awake interest of a young American turned loose in a world of pleasant possibilities.

There was breakfast, for instance, with one eye upon griddle-cakes and maple syrup and everything good, and the other upon the wide blue curve of the river over which the train was sweeping on an air-hung trestle; there was the pleasant chat

with the friendly conductor,* who introduced Billy to the observation platform, where the young traveller stood for a delightful half hour watching the new wonders of mist-veiled mountains. There was the sudden rush and stop in some big town, with its brief exciting touch of busy life; and the quick flight again into lonely reaches of forest and valley.

Then Billy, being rather a sociable little chap, found his fellow-travellers most interesting. There was a nice old lady, with white curls under a big black bonnet, who was going out to a son she had not seen for a dozen years. There was a stout, red-faced man, with a big diamond pin, who got a telegram at every station. There was a pale little fair-haired mother, with a cross baby that made the red-faced man swear under his breath. There was a colonel and a judge, and a nice old priest who was a missionary among the Indians.

Before the first day was over, Billy had established friendly relations with everybody within his immediate reach. He had shut the windows, whose draught was too strong for the old lady's rheumatic

shoulder; played "pat-a-cake" with the cross baby; found a lost notebook for the red-faced man; changed seats with the judge, who wanted to be near a friend; and warmed the old priest's heart by his filial greeting of "Father."

He had learned that the nice old lady had doubts about getting on with "Jim's wife": she always "suspicioned" daughters-in-law. He had discovered that the red-faced man had a bay mare worth ten thousand dollars. He had heard all about the cross baby's sick father at Silver City; and the judge's youngster,— "just about your age, sonny; but a regular bucking broncho of a boy. He won't stand bit or bridle, my Bob." And then a long-limbed, grizzle-headed man, who had come into the car at the last station, and taken the seat beside Billy, chuckled grimly to himself as the judge turned away to have a smoke.

"That's a big brag, ain't it?" he said to Billy.

"I—I don't know," was the hesitating answer. "I didn't exactly understand."

"About that Bob of his being a bucking broncho that nobody can bust? I'd like

to take a hand at him. He wouldn't be too much fur me, you kin bet. Ez it is—well, he's in good training for a halter-in of a lariat. There ain't a bigger young devil west of the Rockies than that same Bob Bryce."

"You mean that he is a real bad boy?" Billy made a polite effort at understanding this new native tongue.

"Bad!" echoed the other, turning a pair of keen blue eyes on his young neighbor. "Bad ain't no name for Bob Bryce. He is mean,—rotten mean. I ain't got nothing to say agin kicking colts. I was one myself; and I ain't done kicking yet, if folks put the curb on me. But, young or old, I wasn't never like Bob Bryce. You know him, sonny?"

"No," answered Billy. "I never heard of him before."

"Well, you don't want to know him," said the other, briefly. "He is the sort of boy to shy away from if ever he comes in your range."

"I guess he won't," replied Billy. "I'm going pretty far from—from everybody."

"How far?" asked his new friend, with interest.

"Coyote Creek," answered Billy, always glad of a chance to be sociable.

"Coyote!" echoed the other. "Whew, that is something of a jump from a Pullman palace car! So you're going *there*? Who's taking you?"

"Nobody," said Billy. "I am going out to my brother. He has a big ranch there."

"Your brother!" The big man stared at the young speaker. "You don't ever mean Rackety Jack?"

"No, I don't," said Billy, decidedly. "My brother's name is Dayton—John Mallory Dayton. He is a gentleman," continued Billy, feeling it necessary to emphasize the wide distinction between Mr. John Mallory Dayton, of Holmhurst, and any person called "Rackety Jack."

"Oh, he is?" said the other, with a low chuckle. "I beg pardon, sonny! Mr. John Mallory Dayton? It seems to me ez if I have heard that name before."

"I think you have," said Billy, plunging cheerfully into family history, "dinged" into his head by Miss van Doran. "There have been John Mallory Daytons for two hundred years. One of them was a colonel in the Revolution; he got killed in the

battle of Brandywine; we have his coat at home, with a hole in the breast. And another was a governor; they've got his statue in the State House, and it would look just like Jack if it hadn't long hair and a choking collar. There has been a lot of them. Jack—my brother Jack—is the last of them; for father died five years ago, when I was only seven."

"Tough luck!" said the big man, his voice a little gruff. "And so your brother is going to father you? Well, I jump off here, sonny; so it must be good-bye and good luck to you! But if—if—" (the speaker hesitated) "you're a long way from home; and if things shouldn't go right with you, there's my keeard. You can call for me."

He scribbled a name on the back of an envelope, handed it to Billy, gave him a parting grip, and then lightly vaulted from the moving train without even asking for a "slow up."

For a moment Billy could only stare after his late companion, in breathless amazement at this reckless mode of departure; then he glanced at the bit of paper in his hand. Scrawled in rude

chirography on it was the name "James J. Rainey, Grizzly Gulch, Wyoming"; and, pocketing this "keeard," with his fingers still numb from the mighty hand shake of Mr. James J. Rainey, Billy felt with boyish instinct that the big brown man would be all that he had promised,—a friend in need and in deed.

Altogether, it was a pleasant journey, this strong, swift sweep over a world thrilling with fresh new life. Billy was whirled through miles of waving wheat fields, that a dozen years ago had been wild, free wastes; through hustling towns, very little older than himself; over dizzy heights that the great-grandfather in the State House had publicly declared "eternally impassable." He slept peacefully as the train plunged through the mountain pass where the Indians had whooped defiance at the "pale-face" in his own father's time; and dined on creamed chicken and lemon pie as it dashed on a slender trestle over the gorge, still held by the bear and the wild-cat.

But three days and four nights even in a Pullman palace car make a twelve-year-old boy very restless, and anxious

to stretch his legs; and our Billy had been counting miles for three hours, and was quite ready when the conductor called:

“Buckston! Your station, youngster! All off for Buckston!”

Billy, who had spoken friendly good-byes to his fellow-travellers in time, made a quick scramble of all his small belongings, waved his hand in a final farewell, and sprang to the platform beside the road, where his neatly strapped trunk had just been shoved by a brisk baggage man; while the engine, pausing for only a pant and a shriek, swept off as if impatient of such unimportant delay; and, trailing a long streamer of smoke, vanished in the distance.

Billy looked around him in dismay. This was scarcely the arrival he had expected. He had pictured a lively station, with Jack, behind a pair of mettlesome horses, eagerly awaiting him. He found that Buckston really consisted of a wooden shed, a row of abandoned cattle pens, and a telegraph pole. Wide fields of alfalfa stretched into the blue shadows of a mighty mountain that already screened the westering sun.

Billy tried the rude door of the station, only to find it locked. He thumped vigorously without reply. Happily unconscious of the fact that the late stop of the Limited had been an "accommodation," granted at the anxious request of Uncle Martin, who did not know that Buckston had been blotted off the new railroad schedule in favor of a livelier rival twenty-five miles distant, Billy sat down on his trunk to wait. Jack would come in a few minutes, of course. Mamma had telegraphed the exact train and time, and there could be no mistake.

But, golly, it was lonely,—the loneliest place Billy had ever struck! A big black-winged bird wheeled in the clear blue sky above him; the smoke trail of the vanished engine floated a grey cloud now in the golden air; otherwise there was no sign of life. Our young traveller kicked at the new sole leather on the sides of his trunk and whistled. If there was a little shake now and then in his whistle we can scarcely wonder; for the blue shadows of the great mountains were growing longer and deeper. Night was coning on; still there was no sign of Jack.

III.—BAR CROSS RANCH.

"HI-YI there!" Cub Connors threw his galloping pony back on its haunches as he reined up at the big porch of the Bar Cross Ranch, and flung a yellow envelope at the feet of a tall gaunt man who sat smoking in the sunset. "There's another for you! Fifth in two days. Somebody must have money to burn at the other end of the line! I'd like to know what's up."

The smoker, whose long, lean figure had gained him the sobriquet "Bony Ben," reached down and picked up the telegram.

"What's the price?" he asked briefly.

"Same as before—three dollars. It's special delivery of twenty miles; and Dad ain't sending me and Kicker up from Rooker's for nothing. You ought to call a halt on that there lightning ticker in the East, or tell them to stretch a private line. But this time it's 'Reply.' You can see it written on the envelope—'Reply.' And I'm to wait for it," continued Cub, relaxing into careless ease in his saddle;

while Kicker, having recovered balance and temper, began to nibble at the young cottonwood trees beside the road.

"Ye'll have a long wait, then, Cubby," answered Bony Ben, calmly. "The boss ain't home."

"He ain't?" said Cub, who was a keen-eyed, freckle-nosed product of the advancing frontier. "You mean to say that all them tellygrams I've been shooting up here at three dollars a clip have been accumulating for his visé? You better get busy right now and see what's up. Tellygrams flying like this mean business that can't wait; and it's 'Reply' this time, as I told you."

Bony Ben looked doubtfully at the sealed envelope. In the rude and simple ways he had trodden for five and forty years, a sealed paper was sacred. He had known men to be shot and hanged for tampering with such private and personal matters. Four telegrams lay already on the desk of the "boss," awaiting his return. Ben could see to the sheep and the horses and the dogs; he could look after food and fodder and water; cow-boys and herders, even Chang, the Chinese

cook, moved to his word, and hesitated to rouse the lightning in his sunken eye; but there were limits even to the foreman's responsibilities; and the boss—well, the boss went ways unknown and untravelled by Bony Ben,—ways where he had no right to “butt in.”

“Durned if I’m going to meddle!” he said, with grim resolve.

“Meddle!” echoed Cub, jerking Kicker away from the cottonwood,—“meddle with a tellygram! Why, you old moss-grown boulder, *somebody* has to meddle, and mighty quick at that. Don’t you see it says ‘Reply’?”

“That’s straight, Bony!” A grizzled old man, who was seated on the porch step, his chin resting on his knotted stick, was roused into life and vigor. “Cub is too big for his breeches, I allow; but he is talking straight. That tellygram can’t wait another week for the boss to read it. You’d better bust it open and see what’s up. Or give it to me.”

“Good for you, Daddy!” cheered Cub, as the old man took the envelope Ben handed him, and tore it open with his crooked, trembling fingers. “You ain’t

no moss-grown boulder, Daddy. Spit out the message! What's up?"

And slowly Daddy read:

"Holmhurst, Del., September 20."

"Holmhurst?" repeated Daddy. "Did you ever hear tell of Holmhurst, Bony?"

"Yes," answered Bony, briefly. "That's where the boss hails from. The message is private and particular, as I knew."

"Oh, cut out the 'Holmhurst' and go on!" said Cub, impatiently.

"To Mr. John M. Dayton, Bar Cross Ranch, Buckston, Colorado——"

"Buckston!" echoed Cub. "Buckston was cut off the map two weeks ago. Ain't a breath of life left. Dead, buried, and forgotten. And the Easterners ain't found it out yet! Go on, Daddy! Reckon that's a notification that the Civil War is over and Abe Lincoln shot."

Heedless of Cub's scoffing, the old man went on:

"Have had no answer to telegrams. Very anxious. Billy will arrive at Buckston by Western Limited, 3.30 Saturday, September 23. Be sure to meet train. Answer at once.

"MARIAN S. DAYTON."

“‘Billy’?” repeated Daddy, blinking at the paper he held at arm’s length to suit his failing sight. “Now, what sort of live stock do you suppose Billy can be?”

“Durned if I know!” said Ben, gruffly. “Heard something of a new trotter. There ain’t no telling what mark he’s going to shoot for next. But here he comes now to talk for himself,—and a crowd of galoots with him as usual!” added Bony Ben under his breath, as a clatter of hoofs and the sound of jovial voices came from the Gulch below, where the trail wound along the wild banks of Coyote Creek before it clambered up the sharp ridge of the Ranch.

“Give me that telegram,” said Ben, taking it from Daddy’s hand. “And you wait here, Cub. You’ll get your reply now.”

And the speaker rose to his full height, as half a dozen riders came laughing and shouting up the road; a handsome, dark-eyed young fellow of about five and twenty at their head.

“Here we are, boys!” cried the leader, as they drew up under the cottonwoods that girdled the long Ranch. “Spread out

as you please, and call for what you want. You know what Bar Cross is when its master is at home again. Don't know why I show up at this old roost at all! I'd rather be anywhere else.—Halloo, Ben! Steady on the job as ever, I see. Whoop up that slant-eyed Chincook, will you? Tell him there's a bunch of us for dinner, and to put plenty of bottles to cool."

"I'd like to speak to you first," said Ben, briefly. "Cub Connors is waiting for an answer to this telegram."

"Oh, confound the telegrams!" said the master of Bar Cross, impatiently. "The moment I strike this place it's like hitting a buzz saw."

And the speaker took the dispatch from Ben's hand and cast a swift frowning glance at it.

"Billy! Billy! Billy! Who—what? Surely not Billy-Boy! What does this mean, Ben?"

"Durned if I know!" answered Ben. "There's four more of them on your desk. Maybe they'll tell you. They've been coming pretty regular at three dollars a head."

"A telegram! What's up? No bad news

I hope, Jack?" questioned Jack's guests, who, having hurriedly dismounted, gathered around their host anxiously.

"I can't tell yet. I'm going to see," was the answer; and the master of Bar Cross nervously disappeared in the house, leaving his friends to discuss the situation in guarded tones.

"Somebody dead or dying maybe at home," suggested a red-haired man, with a nod.

"More likely a haul up from Head Centre. Rackety has been doing full justice to his name this last year, as I happen to know," laughed another.

"How much was he out that poker game last night?" asked the first speaker.

"He never tells," replied a tall fellow known as Chips. "'There's no squeal in Rackety. Whatever happens, he's grit straight through."

"Maybe," said the red-haired man. "But there's no grit can stand the grind he's got agin now. Shouldn't wonder, as Dick here says, if this telegram wasn't a haul in from the other end of the line."

"Bah, no!" laughed Chips. "There's only his mother,—one of those little lady

mothers that don't guess things. If the old man was alive he'd pull in the reins with a jerk; but he died five or six years ago, and Rackety is, like the rest of us here in these Sunset Slopes, galloping free, with no one to haul him in."

Meanwhile the subject of this discussion was standing in the little room he called his "office," but which was stacked with anything but official furniture. Boots, saddles, guns, foils were scattered around in picturesque confusion. Cards, sporting magazines; a brace of silver-mounted pistols, cigar boxes and pipes littered the desk, where the four telegrams had been deposited by Bony Ben under a big bit of gold-streaked quartz, that served as paperweight to the cumbrous collection of bills and receipts already gathered there.

Mr. Jack Dayton snatched up one telegram after another, and glanced at each in growing dismay.

"Billy-Boy!" he muttered, with an oath. "Billy-Boy coming! Good Heavens, what shall I do with him? Billy-Boy coming here to me,—a kid like little Billy! I won't have him. Here, Ben, mount quick and rush off a telegram to Rooker's.

Pay double, treble price—*anything* for it. What a fool I am! It's too late: the boy is on his way. Buckston, 3.30! Why" (dark despair settled on the speaker's countenance), "he must be there now!"

"Looks as if he might have been there for the last two hours," said Ben, briefly. "And if it's a boy, as you say, he must find it pretty lonesome. I was out there yesterday. Everything is cut out. Not even a yellow dog in sight. And" (he cast a glance at the fading sunset) "it's growing sort of late."

Billy-Boy's brother ground out another oath between his set teeth. The picture of the little traveller sitting lonely in the gathering darkness was a maddening one. Of all places in the world to send Billy-Boy just now! What could his mother be thinking of? And then he remembered the part he had been playing for the last two years,—the false, deceptive letters he had written to that tender, loving, trusting mother, to that distant home. Billy had been sent out to the brother, the son of whom those letters spoke,—the brave, bold, loving, steady Jack Dayton, who had come out to Bar Cross

Ranch to take his father's place, to do his father's work, to guard the interests of his father's widow and children. And Billy-Boy would find "Rackety Jack!"

With another muttered oath, Jack tore the last telegram into bits and flung it from him.

"It's the dickens of a mess!" he blurted fiercely. "But we can't leave the boy there alone all night. You—somebody must go for him. And all these fellows asked to make a howling, drinking week of it! To bring that soft-eyed kid here now!"

"Whose kid is it?" asked Bony Ben, who always came to the front when his boss gave way like this.

"My brother. Worre luck, my *little* brother, that has been sent out here for his health. He is—let me see—somewhere about twelve years old."

"Well," said Bony Ben, with a chuckle, "you ain't bothering about a twelve-year-old boy. What's here to hurt him? Why, Cub Connors ain't much older, and look at him! He can hold his own against any twenty-year-old galoot at his father's store! I'll go to Buckston for him, as you say; and then just let him tumble in and

take what comes. You don't want to treat no boy of twelve like a sissy girl!"

"No, I don't suppose I do," answered Ben's boss, more calmly. "A boy of twelve! It's hard to think of Billy as a big boy, he was such a soft-eyed little kid when I left home. But that was three years ago. And what a three years it has been! A chap can go a long way to the devil in three years; can't he, Ben?"

"He *can*," answered Ben, grimly. "It don't usually take that time. It depends whether you gallop or trot, and you've rather took to the gallop lately, I'll allow. Things are going pretty bad here at Bar Cross Ranch, I must say. It don't take no scholar to see that. You've sold off nigh all the good stock; and if the water tanks ain't looked to pretty soon—"

"There! there!" interrupted Mr. Jack, impatiently. "It's the old croak just as soon as I hit this confounded place. Let things go, if they must. I'll even up somehow or sometime. One good run of luck, and I'll fix up everything for you, Ben,—everything, old fellow! One good run of luck, and it's bound to come,—bound to come!"

“Not when you run with galoots like them out there,” said Ben, as the sound of noisy laughter came from the porch without. “They’ll skin you neck and crop every time. But you ain’t going to listen to me, I know. The road is too rough for wheels: I’ll saddle Marquita, and he can ride her home. I’m going for the little boy.”

IV.—ALONE AT BUCKSTON.

It had been a long wait for our young traveller. Billy had pulled out at least fifty times the pretty silver watch that had been his mother's last Christmas present. Three forty, four, four twenty, four thirty,—the slender hands marked their rounds steadily, and still Jack did not come. Four forty! Billy found further whistling quite impossible. Something surely must be wrong.

The sun was sinking lower and lower in the cleft of the mountain; and, save a swift-winged bird, skimming now and then in the boundless blue, there was not a living creature in sight. Billy pressed his lips tight together, and kicked harder on his new trunk. How very nice and neat and "homey" that trunk looked in these vast reaches of mountain and sky and alfalfa field, where, manfully striding his own possessions, he seemed facing the whole "wild West" alone!

And that "wild West" had its terrors, as Billy, who had occasionally dipped

into its juvenile literature, knew. Indians, bad men, wild-cats, mountain lions,—all had figured in the tattered yellow-backed romances over which he had spent stolen, breathless hours in Dick Fealy's attic. It would be most inspiring to brave these perils with Jack or some big-booted cowboy beside him; but alone, here in the gathering darkness! Billy felt a queer flutter under his breast-pocket, such as he had never, *never* felt before,—not even on the day when Jack had made him fight Joe Slevin. It was a sort of flutter that made him cold and weak. The sun was nearly down; the dark green of the alfalfa fields was changing to purple; soon it would be dark, and—and—Billy's mind recoiled from further fancy. He could not think of being here in the dark alone.

Oh, why did not Jack come? Maybe he was sick, hurt, dead! But no: that could not be. Some one would have telegraphed. Not for one moment did doubt of that dear big brother enter into Billy-Boy's loyal heart. Something or somebody else might be wrong or stupid, but Jack, the loved hero of all his boyish dreams, never!

He took another peep at his watch, and his lip quivered. Five fifteen! The cleft in the mountain was now ablaze with sunset splendor; the purple shadows on the wide field were deepening; there was a ripple in the alfalfa as the evening wind came whispering down from the heights. Pictures began to rise before our young traveller's mind,—the cheery wood fire that crackled just at this hour in mamma's pretty sitting-room; the tea table with the pleasant glitter of silver visible through parted portières; old Towser asleep on the bearskin rug before the fire,—the skin whose wearer papa had shot on this very ridge before even Jack was born. Billy chilled at the thought that another bearskin in its original form might have its flaming eyes upon him now.

Oh, why had he ever left home? Why had he ever come to this lonely place to be expanded? Why did not Jack come? If he were only back home with Towser on the old bearskin, with mamma softly touching the piano in the gathering shadows, with Dolly doing her algebra under the library lamp across the hall, with the delicious fragrance of fresh-baked

biscuit—maybe hot gingerbread—stealing from the kitchen! A big lump seemed to rise in Billy-Boy's throat. If he had been just a little younger, he felt he would have given up and let the tears come; but a boy almost in his teens—a boy big enough to travel West alone to his brother, a boy who had riding breeches, 'putties,' and an army blanket even now in his trunk—could not be mollycoddle enough to cry.

So Billy swallowed the lump as best he could, and winked hard and fast at the darkening landscape; and thrust his hands resolutely into his reefer pockets, where he struck something Miss Carmel had slipped in just as they parted at the station. A lovely little Rosary of garnet and gold,—Miss Carmel's own pretty Rosary; for she had had no time to buy him another, and he had seen it twined around her white wrists often in Sunday-school where she taught Billy's class.

Dear, sweet Miss Carmel, who knew how to stop catechism when fellows stammered over the "Eight Beatitudes," and tell some pretty story, so she wouldn't have to give bad marks. What was the story she had told them only a little while

ago, about people saying the Rosary while the soldiers fought against the Turks, and won a great battle that made all the Christian world rejoice?

Billy couldn't remember names or dates just now; but he felt that, while big boys might not cry, they had soldierly examples for praying under difficulties. So he proceeded to say his Rosary bravely, while the sun went down banked in clouds of gold and crimson, and the purple shadows on the alfalfa fields deepened, and the wind blew up so fresh that our little traveller had to button up his reefer close to his throat, and sit down behind the friendly shelter of his trunk to keep warm.

"Hail Mary; Holy Mary," went up the innocent petitions, as powerful now in all human need as when they turned back the infidel hordes of the Turk from Christian Europe long ago. And, soothed by the blessed monotone, Billy-Boy's fears and doubts merged into a dreamy weariness. The fourth decade seemed to blend with his mother's twilight music, with the cracking of the big hickory log on the home hearth, with the soft

breathing of old Towser on the bearskin rug,—and then all things vanished in happy unconsciousness, and the weary boy, his Rosary still twisted in his fingers, rolled over on the rough platform in the shelter of his trunk, sound asleep.

The sky was a glory of stars when Bony Ben, on his favorite mount Boris, with the well-trained Marquita picking her dainty way down the mountain path in his leading, took the last lap in his twenty-mile ride from Cross Bar Ranch to Buckston. Though boys of twelve might be able to shift for themselves, according to Bony Ben's notions, he was not without a certain amount of sympathy for the youthful "tenderfoot" left so late in the loneliness of a mountain pass,—for such Buckston had become since its official desertion.

"It's a shame somebody hadn't sense enough to meet the boy! I guess Cub was right: I ought to have busted open them tellygrams myself. But I never did like butting in on private business. Can't tell what sort of dynamite you might hit, and the boss has taken to ways it ain't safe to follow. Just letting himself

and Bar Cross Ranch go to the dogs as fast as they can go. Betting, drinking, gambling with the worst of the galoots that come streaking out here because it ain't safe for them at home. Yes, he's going the gait sure. And such high-stepping stock as he comes from, too. Looks a pity somebody couldn't catch his bridle rein and haul him in. It would have to be a mighty gentle hand, or he'd rear and kick. This blooded stock is queer."

Ben now turned the curve of the Ridge and began his descent to the railroad. Presently he resumed his soliloquy:

"There was that Arab devil Pancha at the Three Star Ranch. The boldest broncho buster daren't tackle him when he tossed his head and rolled his fiery eyes; and yet Miss Lucy, the boss' sixteen-year-old daughter, could quiet him into a lamb with just a touch of her hand. Yes, blooded stock is queer. You never can tell how it's going to round up. And bringing another youngster of the same sort out here now! Seems sort of a pity to toughen up such high-class stock. But it ain't my lookout.

"Here's Buckston now,—dead enough, as Cub says; and not a youngster in sight! Couldn't expect any live boy to set roosting here nearly three hours," continued Ben, as he guided Boris along the track. "I wonder where he has gone to? Halloo! here's a trunk! And, Jehosaphat!" the speaker drew rein. "If that ain't the chap behind it, fast asleep! Halloo, there, youngster! Wake up! Don't you hear me? Wake up!"

There was no answer. The stentorian shout failed to disturb Billy's slumber. He thought it was only the shriek of the steam engine as he had heard it these last few nights mingling with his dreams.

With a sudden fear in his heart, Ben unlimbered his long legs from Boris, flung Marquita's leading rein over her saddle, and strode forward to investigate. Billy's cheek was pillowed in his arm; his cap had fallen off, and the short soft curls that, despite Jack's early "barbering," had never stiffened, fell in loose rings over his brow; his lips were parted in a happy smile; one brown stubby hand still held Miss Carmel's Rosary. It was such a picture of boyish innocence as had never

met Bony Ben's gaze before, and he stared at it in bewilderment.

"Lands, if he ain't sleeping here in the dark like a year-old baby! And such a pretty chap, too—like Rackety Jack turned kid again. And, jingo, if he hasn't been praying! There's beads in his hand like—like hers!"

An odd spasm of pain crossed his face; for long ago—very long ago, it seemed now to Bony Ben,—when he was a ruddy-cheeked, bright-eyed cowboy riding for an old Spanish ranchero, there had been a little dark-eyed Dolores living in an adobe house near the mission, who had won his big, brave heart. But her parents had frowned on the wild young Americano; and Dolores, like the dutiful little Spanish daughter she was, had submitted to their will, until a quick fever seized her, and she knew that she was dying. Then she asked to see Ben just once more, to say "Good-bye." Her little brother mounted a swift mustang and rode to find Ben. But he was far out on the range; and when he came, galloping his horse into a foam, it was too late: Dolores lay white and still, with the blessed candles burning

around her, and her Rosary clasped in her folded hands. It seemed to Ben that his youth and heart and hope had all died within him at the sight. He had asked for the Rosary; and, though he was an American and a "heretic," the mother had given it to him, in pity for his grief. And he had kept it all these long, lonely, loveless years that had made him the gaunt and grim Bony Ben.

So it was that now the sight of Miss Carmel's Rosary made his heart stir with the old unforgotten pain. He bent over the little sleeper with a new softness in eye and tone.

"Here, sonny! You can't sleep here all night. Wake up!"

He shook Billy's shoulder gently, and the boy started up in wide-eyed fright.

"Who—what—where am I?" he faltered, looking up at the tall stranger, and casting a bewildered glance around him.

"There! there! Don't be afraid, sonny. You're all right now."

"Why—why, it's night!" said Billy, sitting up and rubbing his eyes. "I must have been asleep."

"Asleep!" chuckled Ben. "Well, I

thought I'd never get you awake. But this here mountain air does lull folks powerful at first. It's a regular dope. Afterward they wake up," he added grimly. "You're Mr. Dayton's brother, I take it. Well, he sent me after you. I'm his foreman—Ben Morris. I've got a pony here to take you to Bar Cross Ranch. So jump up and let's be off!"

Billy, quite wide-awake now, jumped up gladly.

"Oh, but I'm glad you've come! I thought I'd have to stay here all night."

"It looked rather like it, I must say," answered Ben. "You see, your brother wasn't home when the tellygrams came, or I'd have been to meet you much earlier."

"Is he home now?" asked Billy. "Then why—why didn't he come himself? Is he sick or—or anything?"

"Sick! No, child!" said Ben, promptly. "But he was sort of held up by a crowd of galoots that came to Bar Cross this evening, and he couldn't leave."

"What are 'galoots'?" asked Billy, with interest.

The terse, grim reply that rose to Bony

Ben's lips died there as he met the innocent gaze of the young questioner. There was another stir in the long-silent depths of this big man's heart. He felt an increasing desire to yank this brown-eyed youngster on the next train, and ship him home C. O. D. But shipping kid brothers home was not a foreman's business, so he answered:

“‘Galoots’ is jest a name for folks you don’t care very much about; and a crowd of them happened to stray into Bar Cross to-night, so your brother couldn’t leave very well.”

“Of course not,” assented Billy, cheerfully. “It would not have been polite. But I didn’t know Jack had much company at Bar Cross Ranch. I’m real glad. I like company, though I’d never be lonesome even in a place like this with Jack. My, but I want to see him. He is the only brother I have, you know; and I haven’t seen him for three years. It’s a great thing to have a big brother. Mother said she never would have let me come away out here to anybody else but Jack. It was a long distance to come alone, and I’ve never been away from

home before. I tell you I felt pretty homesick for a while this evening, when I was sitting here alone and it was getting dark. But I'm all right now," concluded Billy, as he swung himself delightedly into Marquita's saddle. "What are we going to do about my trunk here? You know I'll need it."

"That's true," said Ben, who had been thinking—thinking very fast for him—during the last five minutes. "You see, I was so excited I clean forgot about your trunk. I rather guess it has some valuables in it, too."

"You bet it has!" replied Billy, emphatically. "There's an army blanket, and corduroy riding breeches, and a pair of 'putties' that cost five dollars; and mother's picture in a silver frame for Jack, and a pair of slippers that Dolly worked for him in violets and roses. Uncle Martin told me the last thing to lookout sharp for my trunk when I got here."

"We will," said Bony Ben, with sudden resolution to keep Billy from Bar Cross Ranch and its company to-night, let what would come after. "It wouldn't be safe

to leave that trunk here and ride off twenty miles. Like as not you'd never see it again," continued Ben, ignoring the fact that nothing but crows and coyotes were likely to catch sight of Billy's baggage in this lonely spot. "If you don't want to lose that there trunk, we'd better bust open old Tony Tomkins' shed and camp here until day."

V.—A FIRST NIGHT.

CAMP here! "Camp"! The word sounded most inviting, especially from this big brown man, in whom Billy already felt instinctive confidence; for the appearance of Bony Ben, tall and gaunt in his loose flannel shirt, with pistols stuck in his leather belt, his general air of strength and assurance, made Buckston seem a very different place from what it had been an hour before.

"But Jack!" interposed Billy, doubtfully. "Jack won't understand why I don't come. He will be worried about me if I stay here."

Over Bony Ben's bearded lips there flickered a grim smile which his companion did not observe; for Ben had seen the bottles the Chinook was cooling for the feast to-night, and knew that Jack was now far beyond all brotherly worry. And as the picture of the mad revel that was no doubt already in full swing at Bar Cross rose before him, his resolve strengthened to keep this clear-eyed young "tender-

foot" out of it at least for to-night. To-morrow—well, Rackety Jack's guests might scatter to-morrow, or at least be lying dull and stupid after their orgy.

"Oh, your brother won't mind!" he answered gruffly. "He'll think you went on to Rooker's, and will expect you stay at Cub Connors' till morning. Folks that come in the evening train most always do. This here ain't the East, where you can count on just how folks are going to move. We jump rather livelier out here. Your brother won't do any worrying if we don't show up to-night. Besides, it's a twenty-mile ride, and you're cold and hungry."

"Can you get anything to eat here?" asked Billy, with interest.

"We'll make a try for it, anyhow," said Ben, with a chuckle. "Just jump down again, and fling Marquita's rein over that post there. She'll stand! That filly's got more sense than most women folks. I trained her myself, and she'll stand anything. Now!" as Billy-Boy dismounted from Marquita and fastened her as Ben suggested. "We'll see if we can break in."

And, to the dismay of our young traveller, unaccustomed to the free-and-easy methods of the West, Bony Ben put his shoulder against the rough door of the shed behind them, brought the leverage of his tall frame upon it, and it burst open under the pressure showing rather a roomy shelter within. The unceremonious intruder took a match box from his pocket and lit a big red signal lantern hanging to the wall. In its ruddy glow Billy-Boy saw a rough, low-roofed room, that had apparently served the triple purpose of store, post office, and station. There were a few straight-backed benches for waiting travellers, three spittoons and a stove, a short counter with a few shelves behind it, some boxes and barrels, while a row of pigeonholes on one side was marked "Buckston Post Office."

"Dead-and-gone, sure!" chuckled Ben, as he swung the lantern around for a full survey. "Well, Buckston was never more than half alive, anyhow; and Tony Tomkins wasn't the kind to keep it on the kick. Rather be up on the mountains herding sheep. Let's see what he's left behind in the way of provender. For I

reckon Tony calculates smuggling back here under cover when the snow falls. Here's some bacon! That ain't bad. And there's meal, sugar, coffee, canned milk, crackers. Well, I guess we'll be able to get up something to eat, sonny, if we can find anything to burn. Here's a few old boxes. I'll split them up, and we'll make things hum."

And while Billy-Boy stared in bewildered dismay, wondering uneasily if he would not be held accessory to these burglarious proceedings, Ben filled the rusty stove with the broken boxes, applied a wisp of burning paper, and soon had a fire snapping and crackling into cheery blaze.

Billy still looked on doubtfully.

"The police would take us up for this at home," he said.

"Would they?" asked Bony Ben. "What for? We ain't hurting anybody, and food and fodder is free for the taking out here, youngster. You can't count altogether by dollars and cents in long stretches, like these mountains and prairies of ours. Don't be afraid, sonny. Tony would make you and me welcome

to anything we find, just as I'd let him bust in my shack to-morrow for anything *he* happened to want. Of course if there were women folks it would be different: they mightn't like meddling. But old mavericks like Tony and me don't care a fig. Now you just sit down and watch me get supper."

Billy watched, and he was hungry enough to watch with interest. It was a very different performance from the kind that he had hitherto witnessed at home, when, perched on a corner of the kitchen table, with a shining array of pans and dishes around him, and all sorts of "sugar and spice and everything nice" within reach, he had watched Aunt Dinah concocting the cookies and crullers that make a boy's mouth water. But this tall, rawboned Ben had ways of his own, that made Billy's brown eyes open at the things he did to-night with an old coffeepot and a rusty frying-pan. Our young traveller could scarcely believe his eyes or nose or mouth when the rough shed began to fill with delicious odors of hot coffee and fried bacon; and Bony Ben "landed" a whole supper on a tin plate, filled a stone

mug with steaming milky coffee, drenched a big smoking flapjack with molasses, and told Billy to "pitch in."

As it had been at least seven hours since dinner, there was no need of a more formal invitation. Billy "pitched in" like the very hungry boy that he was; and never, *never*, not even with mamma's beautiful silver wedding service glistening before him, and his own especial christening fork and spoon at his plate, had a supper tasted so good. Dinah's rice waffles and creamed chicken couldn't touch it. When the second mug of coffee had been disposed of, and two, three, four flapjacks had vanished to the last crumb, Billy gave a sigh of supreme satisfaction.

"Golly! that was a good supper,—a heap better than I got on the dining car last night, and they have a French cook and a kitchen full of everything. I peeped in yesterday. I got so tired staying in one car that I had to walk around."

"Had a long trip of it?" asked Ben, who, having swabbed out his kitchen utensils, stretched his long limbs before the fire, tilted his chair against the wall,

put his feet on the back of a bench, and proceeded to light the pipe he brought from his pocket.

"Three days and three nights," replied Billy; "and we came a whizzing, too. I hate to think how far I am from home."

Bony Ben did not like to think of it either, but he was too wise to say so.

"Oh, you can whiz back again when you get ready!" he remarked. "Calculate to stay some time?"

"I don't know exactly. The doctor said he thought about six months of it would fix me up."

"Where do you want fixing?" asked Ben, briefly.

"It's my lungs," replied Billy. "They don't expand right. I had pneumonia last winter, and mother got worried because I didn't weigh as much as Jack did at my age, and she sent for the doctor."

"And he had to say something to earn his pay," growled Ben. "Couldn't you get fixed nearer home?"

"Well, I suppose I could," said Billy, thoughtfully. "But he knew all about Bar Cross Ranch and Jack, and said that was the best mother could do for me,—

to pack me right off to Jack. You see it isn't every boy that has a big brother like Jack."

"Your mother must be rather an old lady, isn't she?" queried Ben.

"Mother old!—my mamma old!" repeated Billy. "Why, no! She is just as young and pretty as she can be. She looks almost as young and pretty as Miss Carmel; only mamma wears black, and that makes her seem sort of solemn and sad."

"And she has only you two boys?" Ben had never before inquired into family matters, but his interest in this little stranger was deepening every moment.

"No: there's Dolly (Dolly is my sister); and there's Miss van Doran, our governess; and Aunt Lou."

And, once started on the home track, Billy proceeded to inform his new friend fully in family affairs. Before he was through, Bony Ben had learned all about the pretty Eastern home, the gentle widowed mother implicitly trusting her idolized son; he had heard all about the virtues and perfections of that big son and brother who was the manly hero of the

tender, loving hearts he had left behind. And as Ben listened to the artless narrative, and recalled the present owner of Bar Cross Ranch, a queer tightening came upon his throat and in his heart.

"So you wanted to come out here from all that?" he asked curtly, as Billy concluded a description of Holmhurst, and the swing under the horse-chestnuts, and the tennis court that had been Jack's pride, and the dogs that had been papa's own. "Don't tell me you were such a little goose as to *want* to come out here!"

"Yes," answered Billy, lifting his brown eyes to the speaker's face,—“yes, I did, because—because—I was afraid that, being there just with ladies, without papa and Jack, I'd grow up a mollycoddle, soft and girly and easy like. Mother doesn't like me to fight or get my clothes dirty or talk rough, and when you are the only boy at home and your mother is sad, you don't want to worry her. Jack said when he shook hands good-bye: ‘Don't let them make a mollycoddle of you, Billy. Remember a Dayton must be a man.’ That is the reason I am glad to come out here. I think it will make me a

man." And there was a look in Billy's face, as he said the word, that the old great-grandfather in State House Square would have liked to see.

"So that's what you're after?" observed Bony Ben, with his deep chuckle. "Well, sonny, I rather guess you're in for the making one way or another out here. Sort of pity you didn't let your mother hold the job till you were half a dozen years older. I've seen home-made men that were pretty hard to beat. Didn't I hear you say something about having a blanket round?"

"Yes: it's in my trunk."

They went out on the platform, where Billy opened his trunk and brought out the army blanket; and Bony Ben caught glimpses of blouses and collars and all sorts of mother touches, that further stirred this big man's heart.

"I didn't think I'd want it so soon," said Billy, as he shook out the warm heavy folds. "It's a dandy, isn't it?"

"Fine!" answered Ben. "No man could ask a better. Just roll up on that bench and go to sleep. I'm going to stretch my legs out here and finish my pipe."

And, as Billy was feeling sleepy enough to agree cheerfully to this proposition, the new friends parted with a cordial good-night,—Bony Ben tramping up and down the platform puffing vigorously at his pipe, as if it somewhat relieved his troubled thoughts,—thoughts that Billy-Boy had sent straying far from their usual prosaic ways to-night. And when he paused for a moment to peep in and see if the boy was comfortable, and descried Billy kneeling by the rough bench spread with the new blanket, saying his prayers, Ben turned away quickly, and hit back the rough word that rose by long custom to his lips, muttering only from the depths of his honest heart:

“And he’s come to be made a man of *here!* Thunderation! I’ll stop the making if I can!”

VI.—WITH BROTHER JACK.

It had been a wild night at Bar Cross Ranch. The Chincook had cooled bottles until there were no more left to cool; and the uproarious merriment that always characterized the return of the master to his domain had not died away until the eastern sky had begun to flush with the dawn. But everything was very quiet now, for it was nearly ten o'clock in the sun-bright day.

The guests had staggered, or been conveyed by the careful Chang, who had long practice in such matters, to their several rooms, where they were sleeping off the effects of their midnight revel; and the master of Bar Cross himself was just waking from an uneasy slumber, to a dulled sense of anxiety and remorse. He had lost at cards again, he remembered vaguely; lost to Chips and Sandy Nick as usual; lost how much he could not recall. And he had been over head in debt before this last night had added to the score.

And—and there was something else, too. What was it that had happened to madden him yesterday? Rackety Jack ran his trembling hands through his curling hair, that lay damp upon his brow, and tried to think. What new trouble was coming or had come? Something had made him rage and swear, he knew,—something that his befuddled brain refused to recall. He struck the gong that the wary Chang always provided for his master's awakening; the almond-eyed Celestial had grown wise in "Amellican" ways, and kept out of reach the morning after a prolonged feast. Pedro, a light-footed Mexican boy, responded rather timidly to the summons.

"Send Ben Morris up here," said the master, curtly, in Spanish.

"*Si, señor,*" answered Pedro. "I will at once, señor,—only he is not yet come back."

"Not come back?" echoed the gentleman, irritably. "Where did he go this time of morning?"

"It was not this morning, but yesterday, señor," replied Pedro. "He has been gone all night."

"All night!" thundered the master of Bar Cross. "What business had he to be away all night when I need him?"

"It is what I do not know, señor," said Pedro. "He led Marquita over the creek before sundown, and—ah, *gracias a Dios!*" (Pedro cast a relieved glance through the window.) "There he comes now. I will send him at once, señor."

And, glad to escape the rising storm, Pedro bounded lightly away, leaving his master to stare blankly at the road to which he had pointed, where Bony Ben, mounted on big Boris, was tranquilly approaching the Ranch, in apparent unconsciousness of any neglect of duty.

But it was not his missing foreman that held Rackety Jack's bloodshot gaze. Pretty Marquita was cantering easily at Big Ben's side; and seated on the new army blanket that cushioned her saddle was a slender figure, alert with boyish grace, that made the watcher's heart leap for a moment and then almost stand still. That fair young face! Those eyes, shining with love and trust! Those laughing lips! For an instant it seemed the ghost of his own early youth that confronted the

bewildered master of Bar Cross. And then remembrance burst upon him.

Billy-Boy! It was Billy-Boy, whose coming his dulled memory could not recall! Billy-Boy, who had been sent in tender, loving trust to his care! Billy-Boy, his innocent little brother, who was even now at the door!

Rackety Jack, dull, dishevelled, blear-eyed, with every trace of his last night's orgy still visible, reeled back with some blind effort to fly, to escape, or at least to prepare for the clear gaze of those boyish eyes. But it was too late. Even as he tried to stagger from his room, Billy-Boy's voice was in his ear, Billy-Boy's arms clasping him in a rapturous hug.

"Jack! Jack! My own dear big brother Jack! I'm so glad to come to you! The boy at the door told us you were sick, and I just ran right up. Oh, I've got to hug you again, I'm so glad! But, Jack, you are sick indeed,—all weak and trembling!" And Billy's joyful tone faltered into dismay as his brother sank down into a chair as if he had the ague.

"Billy-Boy!" he cried huskily. "Billy-Boy! Is it Billy indeed? And such a tall

big boy! Why, you're not Billy-Boy any longer!"

"Oh, yes I am!" said Billy, eagerly. "I'm just the same, only a little bigger. But, O Jack, you're sick, I know! You look sick. Your face is thin and your eyes all hollow. And you never wrote us a word about it because you knew mamma would worry. You dear old Jack, that was just like you! I'm so glad I came, so you won't be here all alone. Please lie down again. You're too sick to get up. Lie down and let me take care of you."

And Jack, who found walking a little difficult this morning, tottered, under Billy's guidance, to the bed he had started from only a few moments before, and sank down with a groan among the disordered pillows.

"If I had some cologne I'd bathe your head," said Billy, looking around for that first aid to the injured in the old home life.

Jack's apartment, one must confess, was a startling contrast to the brass bed and ruffled curtains that his brother had so recently left. Its wild confusion of boots, blankets, and hastily discarded

garments bore witness to the strenuous character of ranch life. A brace of pistols was flung recklessly on the floor; a hopeless fracture in the mirror told of another "morning after," when the master of Bar Cross had pitched a bootjack at Pedro's head. There was nothing of the mollycoddle about this room, as Billy saw at first glance; and his heart warmed to the big brother enduring such discomforts.

"Oh, don't—don't bother!" muttered Jack. "Send that Pedro up here again, and you run off and look at the horses. They're fine; no better in the country. I can't be civil just yet, Billy. My head is going like—like a mill wheel. Pedro! Where in thunder and lightning is that Dago Pedro?" And Jack started up and struck fiercely at the gong.

Pedro appeared, to be greeted with a string of Spanish, which luckily Billy could not understand. It seemed vigorous and impressive language, however; for Pedro darted off like an arrow from a bow, to return in a moment with a waiter bearing bottles and glasses and ice, and the siphon of soda which Billy recognized as an appurtenance of the correct sick

room. Jack drank with the feverish gusto, of which Billy's pneumonia had left him a vivid remembrance; and then, with another outburst of Spanish to his trembling attendant, Jack sank back among his pillows; while Pedro set the tray aside and came to Billy.

"The señor says you will go with me. It is his wish to sleep."

"Oh, I don't want to leave him here alone!" said Billy, in a troubled voice.

"It is the señor's wish to sleep," repeated Pedro. "We will go down to the corral, the stables—where you please."

Billy glanced with anxious, loving eyes at the worn, haggard face on the pillow. It was like Jack to send him off,—just like dear, brave Jack to want to suffer here alone. And, oh, how ill he looked! How thin and changed and almost old!

The fever, or whatever it was, must have been on him long. And no one even to shake a pillow or straighten up his room! Billy, who remembered the dainty care that surrounded his double pneumonia, looked around him quite appalled.

"The little señor will come with me," said the soft-voiced Pedro.

"No," answered Billy, firmly. "I am going to stay here. I don't want to look at any dogs or horses while my brother is sick like this."

"The señor said he would break my neck if we did not get out," blurted Pedro, in his broken English.

"Pooh!" said Billy. "People always talk like that when they are sick. I mean to stay and watch my sick brother."

Pedro's black eyes rested for a moment in perplexity on the young speaker; then, feeling that these Americanos were quite beyond comprehension, he stole swiftly away before the señor could arouse to more active indignation at this defiance of his commands.

But the morning draught had done its work. Jack's quivering nerves had been steadied; he was still young and strong enough to rally even after a wild night like the one he had just passed through; and, while Billy sat still and watchful by the window, his brother sank into a restful sleep.

He awoke to a vague consciousness of soothing and comfort. He had been dreaming of home. (When had Rackety

Jack dreamed of home before?) He had thought himself back in the old sitting-room, the shadows of the elms flickering in the windows, his mother's hand smoothing his hair; there was a light touch upon his still aching head; a faint, familiar fragrance breathed about him. (Billy had not been a mother's boy for a dozen years without learning mother ways.)

Jack's half-open eyes looked around him in dull wonder. The wild confusion from which he had drifted off to sleep was gone; the room had been straightened by a deft young hand into comparative order. Billy had dived into the depths of his own trunk (which Bony Ben had found means to convey safely to Bar Cross Ranch), and brought out various personal belongings that he felt befitted a sick chamber. The stained and battered tops of bureau and washstand were covered with spotless fringed towels; a sofa cushion (his last birthday present from Miss van Doran, with the Dayton coat of arms worked in elaborate and painstaking cross-stitch) softened the angular outlines of the mission rocker; the accumulation of pipes, papers, cigar boxes and bachelor

débris of every kind had been removed from the mantel, where now the sweet-faced mother smiled down from her silver frame upon her boys.

And, having thus brought Jack's neglected room into some semblance of invalid order, Billy had ensconced himself by his brother's pillow and was softly bathing his feverish brow with Florida water, which mamma had provided for the headaches that still occasionally recalled his illness of last winter to Billy's memory.

Jack lay still for a moment, his half-closed eyes taking in the situation; then he stretched out a trembling hand and clasped that other hand upon his brow.

"Good," he said in a low voice,—
"almost as good as mother's touch! Billy, I dreamed she was bathing my head on that old leather couch at home. And you have been poked up here with me all morning! I thought I told that fool of a Dago to take you out!" And the speaker's voice, that had softened for a moment, was fiercely impatient now.

"Oh, he wanted to," answered Billy, "but I wouldn't go! I couldn't leave you

sick and alone, Jack. Don't you ever have a doctor or a nurse or anybody when you are ill like this?"

"When I'm ill like this!" repeated Jack, puzzled for a moment. "Oh, of course I was pretty done up when you got here, Billy-Boy! But I'm better—nearly all right now. Had a bad night, you see; and—and—" Jack found it difficult to explain his illness clearly, with Billy's brown eyes fixed with such tender anxiety on his face.

"Oh, you can't be all right yet!" said Billy, decidedly. "You had a fever, and only two hours ago were so weak you couldn't stand."

"Was I?" asked the invalid, with a forced laugh. "I do have little spells like that occasionally—'next morning.' You have never heard of 'next morning' aches and shakes, have you, little Bill?"

"No," replied Billy, "I never have. Miss van Doran had second-day ague last spring, and she had a chill every other day at nine. My! she got so yellow and thin! I guess you have second-day ague too, Jack."

"No," said Jack, with the same odd

laugh; "there is no second-day about mine, Billy: it's straight on time. So old 'Van' is still hanging around Holmhurst? She must be pretty well dried up. Come sit down here on the bed beside me, and tell me all the news from home."

"I don't think you ought to talk," said Billy, perching himself beside his brother, and surveying that idol anxiously. "You look as if you had fever yet, Jack."

"Oh, I haven't any fever! I'm all right now,—right as a trivet, Billy-Boy. Do you think I look sick?" asked Jack, nervously.

"Yes," said honest Billy, emphatically,—“real down sick, Jack. Your face isn't round any more, and there are great hollows under your eyes, and your mouth doesn't laugh like it used to when you left home."

"I'm afraid it doesn't," answered Jack. "You see, we learn to laugh on the other side of our mouths out here. But don't bother about me. Tell me about home, and why—what the—I mean how they came to send you out in such hot haste to my brotherly care."

"There was a weak corner in my lungs,"

said Billy. "Doctor MacVeigh said that I did not expand right."

"So that's what you want, is it?" said Jack. "You are here for expansion? Well, it's a good place to get it, Billy-Boy!"

"That's what mamma said," continued Billy. "She told Doctor MacVeigh what a fine, healthy place Bar Cross was, and how big and strong and splendid you were, Jack; and he told her to send me right off to you. It would make a man of me,—a big splendid man just like you."

VII.—LIFE AT THE RANCH.

JACK repeated Billy's words: "A big, strong, splendid man like you!" Then he addressed him: "O little brother, what a kid you are! But go on and tell me all the news." And he lay in grim silence, while Billy, now in full conversational swing, went on.

Jack learned that old Dobbin had died and mamma had sold the carriage; that Black Jim lived at Colonel Woodville's now, and only came to "help" at Holmhurst once a week; that Aunt Lou had given Dolly a fur coat because her old one had grown so shabby; that Mr. Moulton had bought the south lot where the strawberries grew, to build a barn. Quite unconscious of the painful note of economy that his "splendid big brother" caught in this narrative, Billy-Boy diverged from personal matters to tell of the new trolley line that would run by the elm grove, the new marble altar which some wealthy man had given to Father Tom's little church, and of the new boy choir that

wore white surplices and sang on Sundays at High Mass.

"Nobody dead or married since I left?" questioned Jack, suddenly rousing into interest.

"Oh, yes!" answered Billy. "Old Mrs. Flynn that used to do our washing, and the Fealy baby that had spasms, and General Ellis that used to be pushed around in a chair,—they're all dead. And Molly Fealy is married and has two babies, named Michael and Raphael. Miss Carmel was godmother to both."

"Miss Carmel? Then she isn't married yet?"

"Miss Carmel married! Geewhiz, no! I hope she never will be. I'd just hate to see Miss Carmel married; wouldn't you?"

"Well, that depends," replied Jack, slowly. "I used to think several years ago that she would make as lovely a bride as you could see."

"Oh, she would!" replied Billy, enthusiastically. "She'd beat every other bride all to smithereens, you bet! She's pretty enough, anyway; but if you'd get her up in a white veil and wreath like Molly Fealy's, she'd look like an angel sure."

But I wouldn't like to see it," he went on, thoughtfully. "I'd rather have her stay just as she is, teaching Sunday-school, and fixing up the altar, and wearing her flower hats and pretty gowns every day. Oh, I wouldn't like to see her married at all!" said Billy, decidedly.

"Pretty hard hit, for one of your age!" laughed Jack dryly. "Any other fellows hanging around Harrington Hall?"

"Oh, yes!" said Billy. "There are lots of people, and card parties and tea parties and riding parties. Miss Carmel has a grey horse all her own. That new man that has come to live at old General Ellis' home goes riding with her nearly every day."

"You mean Page Ellis?" Jack started up on his pillow. "Page Ellis has come into his uncle's estate of course, and it's a round million if it's a cent. And Page Ellis is—is—" words seemed to fail Jack, but Billy concluded his sentence calmly:

"At Miss Carmel's all the time, and sending her roses and violets and candy. My! it's fine candy. Miss Carmel always saves some for me. But I don't like *him*, all the same," continued Billy, his brow darkening,—*"I don't like him a bit."*

"Neither do I, Billy," said Jack. "He's a snob and a prig—but, good gracious, what am I to fling stones at Page Ellis! He'll get there, you will see!"

"Get where?" asked Billy, puzzled.

"To the winning-post," answered Jack. "But I forgot that you have never been to a race. O Billy-Boy, how much you have to see and to learn!"

"Yes," answered Billy-Boy. "And I'm going to see things now, you bet! Miss van Doran said that, even if I had to leave school for six months, a trip out here would be 'most instructive.' I've learned lots already from that nice Ben. He'll teach me to ride any horse in the place. Oh, I'll have a fine time, I know! And Miss Carmel gave me a kodak that will snap pictures of the place and people I see, to send home; and I promised to write home every week."

"Great guns!" ejaculated Jack, under his breath. "Every week—"

"One week to mamma and the next to Miss Carmel," continued Billy. "She said she wouldn't mind bad spelling, so it won't be hard to write to her. I have to be more particular with mamma, but Miss

Carmel said just scribble ahead any way, and tell her everything. And when I don't have to stop for spelling, I can write real fast. I mean to start a letter to-day. They'll want to know if I got here safe. And maybe I better not say I found you sick in bed."

"No, don't—don't!" said Jack, quickly. "Don't say anything about me, Billy. It would worry mother, you see; and I—I—well, when a fellow is so far away from home, there is no use in writing his troubles. Now run off, Billy. I'm going to get up and take a cold plunge, and—and I'll be all right again. Go find Ben or Pedro to show you around until that Chincook of mine calls you to lunch. Or wait! I'll call somebody to look after you."

Jack struck the gong nervously; and the light-footed Pedro appearing again, he gave Billy into his care.

But as his young brother turned from the room, Jack fell back upon his pillow with a word it was well Billy did not hear,—a fierce, wicked word that voiced the fear, the perplexity, the remorse that this interview had awakened in his heart.

Billy-Boy here, to see, to know, and to tell everything! Billy-Boy here, with his kodak to snap pictures of the ruin and neglect at Bar Cross Ranch; with his busy pen to write everything to his mother! Billy here, with clear, boyish eyes to witness, keen boyish ears to hear, innocent boyish soul to recoil from the wild, reckless scenes around him! Billy here, to find his idolized big brother transformed into "Rackety Jack"!

"Another night like last with Billy in the house, and I'd be ruined forever. He'd catch onto things, I know. I must get these fellows off at any cost, and then—then—"

Jack did not stop to think further, but sprang up and made for the cold plunge that was to steady his shaken nerves.

Meantime Billy, under the guidance of Pedro, was investigating with great interest his new home. To one fresh from the dainty order of Holmhurst, things did look rather rough and careless at Bar Cross. But Billy felt that perhaps broken window-panes, smoke-blackened walls, and battered furniture were necessary consequences of bachelor life. Pedro led

through a wide hall, still bearing traces of last night's revel; and out on a porch, one end of which had slumped down on its rotten timbers, and been propped up temporarily on the fallen trunk of a big cottonwood. Hurrying over this rickety support, Billy stumbled into a hammock swinging from the rafters above.

"Look where you are going, will you?" The surly growl that greeted this accident was prefaced by an ugly oath that made Miss Carmel's Sunday-school pupil start.

"Oh, I—I beg pardon!" stammered Billy, as the occupant of the hammock, a big red-faced man, blinked at him angrily. "I didn't see you."

"You didn't, hey!" said the other, staring in his turn at the trig boyish figure. "Then you'd better keep your eyes skinned, if you don't want trouble. What are you young rascals blundering around here for, anyway? Ready to pick my pocket, I'll be bound!"

Billy could only stand there quite dumb under these amazing questions. But Pedro burst into a flood of voluble Spanish, that made the red-faced man suddenly whirl around in his hammock and sit up.

"George!" he muttered, "I clean forgot. So you're Racket—I mean you're the kid brother Dayton was looking for? It's my turn to beg pardon now, youngster. But I was half asleep when you stumbled into me just now." The speaker's dull, watery eyes were inspecting Billy curiously. "You're—what's the name? Dicky, Harry Dayton?"

"I'm Billy," was the answer; and there was a certain dignity in the boy's tone, for the red-faced man was by no means to Billy's liking,—“I'm William Corby Dayton.”

"Shake hands then, Mr. William Corby Dayton!" said the other, with an odd laugh.

"I'm Nicholson Brett, your brother's good friend and comrade for the last three years. I'm glad to meet you."

Billy shook hands, still conscious of a vague repulsion for this good friend and comrade, that the vigorous grip of the coarse heavy hand did not dispel.

"You're like Rack—I mean Jack," continued Mr. Nicholson Brett, studying Billy; "or like he was in his angel days. And they've sent you out here for your

health? Well, it's a fine place. No better. It will build you up, make a man of you."

"Yes, that was what the doctor said," answered Billy. "But—but it hasn't agreed so well with Jack. He doesn't look as strong and big as he did when he left home."

"He doesn't?" said Mr. Brett, in assumed surprise.

"No, he doesn't," asserted Billy positively. "It would worry mother dreadfully if she could see him. It's the malaria he says. Malaria is a very bad thing to have."

"It is indeed," said Mr. Brett. "And Jack has a little touch of it this fall, as you say; but he will shake it off. We all shake malaria off out here."

"Do you?" asked Billy, in a relieved tone. "I'm glad to hear it. Miss van Doran, our governess, had it for a whole year before she could break it up. Is Jack often as sick as he was to-day?"

"Sick as he was to-day?" repeated Mr. Brett, staring at the anxious young questioner. "As he was to-day! Oh, yes! I see you found him sick this morning! I

see,—I see!” And again Jack’s good friend and comrade laughed his queer short laugh. “Well, yes; he has attacks like that pretty often. You see, when a fellow goes it as hard as that brother of yours—” Something in the gaze of the brown eyes fixed so seriously upon his face made the speaker suddenly pause.

“Goes it hard? Do you mean that he works too hard?” asked Billy, gravely. “Oh, I’m afraid he does, and mamma is afraid of it too!”

“She is?” observed Mr. Nicholson Brett. “Great guns!”

“She lies awake at night, thinking what a hard time poor old Jack is having out here,” continued Billy, glancing at the broken porch and supporting cottonwood. “And if she knew he was sick like I found him this morning—”

“Oh, I wouldn’t tell her!” interrupted Mr. Brett, quickly. “There’s no sort of use in blowing—I mean in worrying your mother about that. You’ll get over it yourself pretty soon, and not mind. Folks don’t mind things out here. Why, boy, you won’t know yourself in a couple of months, you’ll change so.” Mr. Brett

rose and clapped Billy heartily on the back. "We'll make a man of you!"

As the speaker strode off, the rotten porch shaking beneath his heavy tread, Pedro drew a queer hissing breath between his set teeth. With all his inexperience in the ways of the world, Billy was quick-witted enough to understand the significance of the sound.

"You don't like him?" he said, nodding toward the disappearing gentleman.

"*Like?*" repeated Pedro, emphatically. "No! no! no! Bad, much bad, verra bad man,—*diabolo!*" concluded Pedro, with another hiss.

"I don't take much to him either," said Billy, thoughtfully; "but if he's Jack's best friend—"

"Friend? No! no! no!" exclaimed Pedro, shaking his head with each negative. "False, coward! Little señor, see! He pulled up a ragged shirt sleeve and showed his lean brown arm marked with a long red line.

"Oh!" exclaimed Billy with wide-open eyes of dismay. "Who did it?"

"He, he coward," was the fierce answer, "with lash, like if Pedro was a dog!"

"And you didn't hit back?" The spirit of his sturdy forefathers flashed from Billy's brown eyes.

"Hit back?" repeated Pedro, uncomprehendingly. "Hit back is what I do not know. Some day, if he strike again, I keel him."

"Kill him!" said Billy, appalled. "But that would be murder!"

"Yes, little señor," replied Pedro, calmly; "I keel him—sometime."

"But don't you know it's an awful sin even to think of killing anybody," blurted out Billy. "And you'd get hanged besides."

"Yes, little señor, — yes," answered Pedro, showing his white teeth in a friendly smile.

And, feeling that it was quite impossible to impress either law or theology on this new companion, Billy tried to shake off the somewhat troubled doubts that were beginning to rise in his mind, and followed Pedro to the big corral to see the horses.

VIII.—JACK'S "FRIEND AND COMRADE."

"WELL, I've seen him!" Mr. Nicholson Brett stepped unceremoniously into the room where Jack was brushing his hair before the cracked mirror, and incidentally studying the hollows under his eyes. "I've seen the new arrival, Jack; and—" Mr. Brett dropped on the couch, that creaked beneath his two hundred pounds, and laughed softly.

"You mean Billy?" exclaimed Jack. "You've met him—already?" There was perceptible dismay in the speaker's tone. "Nick, I hope you haven't—you didn't."

"No, I haven't—I didn't," answered Mr. Brett, as his friend and comrade paused at the question. "After our first meeting, which was a little inopportune, he and that young Dago came stumbling over me in the hammock, and I greeted them with some vigorous English. After that first mistake, I caught on and was most correct in language and deportment. 'Mr. William Corby Dayton' (he gave me his whole patronymic) and I became quite

friendly and confidential. We discussed family affairs freely. It seems your mother—”

“Stop right there, please!” Jack Dayton wheeled from the mirror and showed a white tense face new to his comrade. “We won’t speak of my mother, Brett. Billy is out here for his health, and I—we must make the best of it. It is confoundedly awkward, I confess, just now. He is a perfect innocent, as you have seen; and I can’t have him shocked and horrified by another night like the last. You’ll have to get the fellows away somehow until—until—”

“Until when?” asked Mr. Brett, fixing a hard, keen gaze upon the speaker’s face.

“Until I can do something with Billy,” was the desperate answer,—“get him off to school or a sanitarium, or any place except Bar Cross Ranch. They don’t guess at home how things are going on here; and I don’t dare tell them, but Billy will.”

Mr. Brett chuckled grimly under his sandy mustache.

“He is out for information on all points, as I can see. He is primed with a bulletin about your health now, Jack. Lookout

that it doesn't go off to-night, and rouse home folks into anxiety about your rapid decline. He wanted to know how many attacks like this you have a week."

"And—and you told him?" again Jack turned white and fierce upon the speaker.

"Bah! I told him nothing. Do you take me for a fool? But" (the speaker's voice grew hard and cold again) "you're against a snag, Dayton, as I can see. Can't you ship the kid home again on some excuse? Say smallpox or scarlet fever, or something killing, has broken out on the Ranch."

"No, I can't," answered Jack, briefly. "I've lied enough, but not like that. If you ever had a home or—or a mother like mine, you wouldn't suggest such a thing. Billy has come West by the doctor's order, and must stay. I'll find some other place for him if I can. Meantime (it doesn't sound very civil) but you and the boys will have to clear out. Take them off to Rooker's or Lockwood's."

"Better go easy on that, my boy!" said Brett, with an unpleasant laugh. "Do you know how many I. O. U.'s you passed over the table last night?"

"No, I don't," answered Jack, shortly.

"Then you had better inquire before you break up this friendly little party, and let Chips 'vamoose' with the loot. It was his turn last night with a vengeance. To-night it will be yours or mine. You know what you told me yesterday. You've got to win before that next note falls due,—got to win or Bar Cross is lost. These fellows have the stuff, as you know—are loaded down with it,—and you are going to throw up your chances with them for this candy kid of a boy!"

"I tell you I won't have him hear or see the sort of thing we had last night," said Jack, with darkening brow and tightening lips,—“not for all that Bar Cross is worth.”

"Then *don't* let him hear or see it. Leave him here and you can come with us. I tell you it's your chance, my boy,—the chance of your life! These fellows have the money to set you up, to square you forever. And if you break things up now—"

"I'll miss it." Jack's sunken eyes began to burn, his thin cheeks to flush feverishly. "I believe you're right, Nick,—I

believe you're right. Luck is bound to come, as you say. It always does if a fellow can hold his bluff long enough! I would be a fool to break up the game now. I'll leave Billy here and go with you to-night."

"Good!" said Mr. Brett, rising. "I thought we could find some way to settle this kid business. I'll fix it with the boys, and get them off quietly to Rooker's; you and I will follow later; and Billy shall sleep the sleep of innocence undisturbed to-night."

And Mr. Brett laughed the laugh Billy did not like, and turned from the room. He had gained his point, as he always did with "Rackety Jack"; and the light in his hard eyes was like the green gleam in a cat's when its paw is on a mouse.

Meantime Billy was making the rounds under Pedro's guidance. He had seen the horses, the dogs, the cow sheds, the water tanks; he had stopped for a friendly chat with old Daddy mending a stirrup strap in the sunshine; he had called on Bony Ben in his own especial shack on the rough-beaten track that led to the gulch; he had peeped at Chang stewing prairie

fowls in his adobe kitchen. It was all "most interesting and instructive," as Miss van Doran had said; though there was much that Billy could not quite understand. The fences were down, and the water tanks empty and broken; the roof of the cow shed had fallen in; and the yard, that stretched down the slope of the hill, was choked with weeds, through which men as well as cattle had to beat their way.

Long years ago mamma had made a summer trip to Bar Cross Ranch, and had such pretty memories of it,—the flowers, the trees; the great mountains, with their changing lights and shadows; the porch, with its gay awnings and Navajo rugs; the old Spanish cook Martina, who made such wonderful "dulces." Doubtless in those days papa had everything arranged for a lady's pleasure; now there were no ladies here, and things were different. Men—"strong, splendid men" like Jack—did not bother about such niceties. So Billy explained to himself the perplexing conditions at Bar Cross in these latter days, and in his loyal young heart absolved Jack from all blame.

And when, about two o'clock, Jack

called him in to lunch, Billy was ready to do full justice to the prairie chicken and baked potatoes and crisp brown biscuit that Chang served, with salaams, on a battered lacquer tray, for there was neither tablecloth nor napkins. The red-faced man of the hammock was the only guest; and he laughed and talked a great deal, and was very friendly,—so friendly that Billy found himself quite forgetting his first prejudice against Jack's "friend and comrade," and chatting with him most pleasantly. Some one had to talk; for, after the two first mouthfuls, Jack pushed the prairie fowl away and sat moody and silent, while Mr. Brett and Billy kept up a cheerful conversation, about hunting and camping and mountain climbing, and all the novel delights that awaited youthful travellers in the untamed West. This new acquaintance had had wonderful experiences, that held his young listener breathless,—encounters with hostile Indians, hairbreadth escapes from bears and wild-cats; he had been caught in a cyclone, hemmed in by forest fires, lost in a blizzard; and had borne himself through all these mischances

with a reckless courage that put in the shade all the heroes of Dick Fealy's bookshelf. Billy felt that if he could only go back to Holmhurst with some adventures like these, Dick Fealy and the other boys would stare indeed.

"Do these exciting things ever happen now?" asked Billy with interest. "I'd like something to happen while I am out here,—something real thrilling, that a fellow could remember always. Nothing ever happens at home—except Christmas and birthdays. Do you think if I stay out here six months—"

"That you will strike something exciting?" laughed Mr. Brett, casting an odd glance at his moody host. "I think it rather likely you will. Here! you are drinking too much of that coyote water, my boy! Let me color it a little for you." And he poured something from the bottle beside him into Billy's glass.

"No!" thundered Jack, suddenly rising from his reverie, and sweeping the tumbler and its contents from the table with a strong fling of his arm. "Not a drop, Brett,—never a drop, Brett, while I've got hand or voice to stop it! That's the

way you began with me. The coyote may run a little fishy, but stick to it, Billy! It won't hurt you like—like that. Don't try it on him, Brett! I won't have it!" And Jack's voice trembled strangely.

"Just as you please, of course," said Mr. Brett; and, though he laughed, the ugly gleam came into his eyes. "The coyote does not agree with everybody, as you know. But it really is none of my business." And the speaker pushed his chair from the table and rose. "I'll leave you to discuss family matters without me. You seem to be facing some knotty problems, I must say." And, laughing again rather unpleasantly, Mr. Brett lit a cigar and slowly sauntered from the room.

"You made him mad," said Billy,—
"real mad. Oh, I'm sorry, Jack!"

"Why?" asked Jack, lapsing into indifference again, as he leaned back in his chair and proceeded to roll a cigarette.

"Because—because he might hurt you somehow," said Billy, drawing a long breath. "He hurt Pedro,—cut his arm with a whip. And Pedro says people fight and shoot and kill each other out here."

"So Pedro has been enlightening you?"

observed Jack, dryly. "I thought he was quite safe."

"Oh, he is!" answered Billy. "He took real good care of me, Jack,—wouldn't let me go near Black Selim or Dandy Jim or any of the dangerous horses. I like Pedro very much, though I can't understand him sometimes. I don't understand lots of things out here."

"Don't try," said his brother briefly. "There's no use bothering your little head about my business, Billy. I'll work out all right in a couple of months, and send mother a cheque that will buy her a new carriage and pair. Just now—well, just now I'm a little short, and Bar Cross isn't in very good shape; but I'll work out all right in a little while. I don't like to worry home folks with my troubles especially women folks. They can't understand, you know, Billy."

"No," answered Billy. "If papa were alive it would be different."

"Very different!" assented Jack, with a grim, remorseful sense of the difference his honest, keen-eyed, strong-willed father would have made under the circumstances.

"I tell mamma everything," added Billy,

thoughtfully. "She said she hoped I always would do so."

"That's all very well for a little boy," replied Jack, feeling somehow as if he were tramping with muddy feet the white snow of untrodden paths. "But men can't and don't tell everything to their mothers, Billy, especially when they are thousands of miles away. So I hope you won't write home that I'm sick or look bad, or—or anything unpleasant that would only worry her."

Billy thought for a moment as if taking in this view of the subject.

"I won't," he answered gravely,—“I won't write mamma anything that will worry her. She worries a lot about you now. She thinks you are working yourself to death out here, and that it must be so lonely and dull. And Dolly wanted to go to the Sacred Heart in Paris with Helen Robbins and Cora Vane; but mamma said we could not afford it, and that we must be willing to do without things when you were sacrificing your life for us. And I guess you are; for you look awfully tired and worried, Jack. You ought to go to bed, and drink milk

and chicken soup, and take a good rest."

"A rest!" repeated Jack, with a harsh laugh. "I don't know what rest means. I haven't known for more than two years, Billy. Rest! Why, if I should try to rest I'd go mad. There!—don't open your big brown eyes at me like that. It will be all right in a little while, Billy; and Dolly will have her turn at the Sacred Heart with the other girls, and mother will have her carriage and pair, and there will be no more trouble or worry for any one. We'll set up old Bar Cross on new legs again, and make things hum. Just you wait and see, Billy,—just wait and see!"

Jack had filled his glass from the bottle Mr. Brett had left beside him, and tossed off the draught feverishly. As he filled it again, his good friend and comrade stalked into the room, and took up his hat and riding gloves from the chair where he had flung them before luncheon.

"What!" said Jack. "You're not going, Nick?"

"Yes," answered Brett, shortly. "I am rather one too many, it seems, just now."

"Not at all, my dear fellow,—not at

all! Don't think of going without me. I'll be with you in a moment. Bony Ben will look out for Billy while I am gone. You won't mind my leaving you for to-night, Billy? I've got an engagement—a most important engagement—that I can't break. I'll be back soon, Billy; and we'll have great times together,—the grandest sort of times, Billy-Boy!"

And Jack slapped Billy on the shoulder in his own hearty style, and in another moment was hurrying off with his friend and comrade in the old impulsive way.

In the old way? Ah, no! Billy felt instinctively that there was a difference he could not explain or understand. As he stood at the Ranch window watching Jack and his best friend and comrade cantering away under the cottonwoods, there was a strange uneasiness in his boyish heart; though he little guessed that there was sad need just now for Miss Carmel's Rosary, or that Jack was venturing among enemies as cruel and pitiless as those turbaned Turks of long ago.

IX.—BILLY'S LETTERS.

MISS CARMEL had been busy all day,—so busy that Grey Eagle had been left in his stable to munch his oats, in comfortable wonder why he was not taking his usual brisk canter over the breezy hills, where Mr. Page Ellis was riding alone in no very good humor. Piety is a very pretty thing in a woman, thought Mr. Ellis; but to spend a glorious afternoon like this dressing an altar in that poor little “Romish” church was carrying it too far.

But Father Tom was to have the Forty Hours’ at St. Monica’s, and the “poor little church” had to be at its best; so Miss Carmel, who, with half a dozen of the Sunday-school class, formed the Sanctuary Society, had her pretty hands full of work. It was lovely at last, as they all agreed when they stood off in breathless delight to contemplate their finished work. Miss Carmel had gently and very tactfully put aside the red and yellow chrysan-

themums that had been heaped upon her from the village gardens; and the new altar, with its snowy blossoms and waxen tapers, stood fair and spotless in the sunset splendor streaming through the "memorial" window, that showed the patient mother-saint pleading for her wandering son.

Miss Carmel knelt for a moment and whispered a little prayer of her own; and then, as her young assistants scattered at the church door to books or games, she took the road that led under the great elms of Holmhurst, to ask for news of Billy, who had now been gone more than ten days.

The old house (Holmhurst had been built by the great-grandfather in State House Square) seemed very strange and quiet this evening, with no Billy to bound out on the pillared porch and shout a welcome. The tennis court was deserted; even the piano was still. There was only Miss van Doran on the porch, with a large pair of shears in her hands, nipping the tender shoots of the climbing roses.

Miss van Doran was good, but neither young nor beautiful; and, swathed this

evening in a grey ulster and muffled in a black veil (for the malarial season was on), she did not add any cheer to the situation.

"Good evening, my dear Miss Carmel,—good-evening! Mrs. Dayton and Dorothea are at Colonel Woodville's. He wanted them to see his Japanese chrysanthemums in perfect bloom. I did not dare to venture, for they will be out until after dark. Come in. It gets a little too chilly for me at sunset. I only slipped out for a moment to prune these young shoots before the frost catches them. It always nips the fresh young shoots first; the old wood can stand the winter through."

"Has Billy's mother heard from him yet?" asked Miss Carmel, as she followed Miss van Doran into the house, where pictures of the Revolutionary Colonel and the great-grandfather seemed to stand in stately guard in the wide hall; and Jack, on his first pony, held the big panel over the fireplace.

"Heard from Billy?" Miss van Doran's malarial countenance broke into smiling wrinkles. "My dear, yes, this morning! Such a very nice letter! I am proud of it."

As I told his mother, I never saw a better production from a boy of his age. So well expressed, and not a word misspelled. Really, it is most creditable. Would you like to see it?"

"Very much, if Mrs. Dayton would not object," said Miss Carmel; and as she sank into the rocker by the sitting-room fire, old Towser rose from the bearskin rug and laid his nose on her knee.

"Object? Not at all, my dear,—not at all!" answered Miss van Doran. "It is the sort of letter that a mother is proud to show. Here it is, in the secretary. I want you to observe the date and margin, and even the punctuation. How *perfectly* correct! You would really suppose that his old teacher was at his elbow. Billy, though a dear, good boy, was a little heedless at times, as you know, and would spatter his ink; but there is not a blot, as you see."

Not a blot, indeed! Miss Carmel felt that she would have liked it better with a little smudge of the boyish hand. The vertical writing, so laboriously taught by Miss van Doran, was so painfully rigid and correct,—every *i* dotted and every *t* crossed.

BAR CROSS RANCH, Colorado

September 28.

MY DEAR MOTHER.—I arrived here safely on September twenty-fourth, after a very pleasant trip on the cars. Ben Morris, who is Jack's foreman, met me at Buckston's, where we had supper and stayed all night; then we rode to Bar Cross next morning. It is a fine place, and I think the air from the mountains will expand my lungs, as the doctor said. I am feeling very well, and have a good appetite for my meals, and take a long ride every day on a pretty pony named Marquita.

Jack has gone away on special business, but will be back soon. He says do not worry, for everything will be all right; and Dolly can go to Paris to school, and you will have a new carriage next year. I was a little homesick at first, but am better now.

Give my love and affectionate respects to everyone I know. I pray God to bless you every night. I have put on my heavy flannels, for it is getting cold out here; and my cowboy shirts fit fine. So I hope you will not worry or feel sad, but trust

in Heaven that we shall meet again. And believe me, ever,

Your devoted son,

WILLIAM CORBY DAYTON.

Miss Carmel read this missive twice over, with a queer little tremor about her lips; while good old Miss van Doran questioned in proud satisfaction:

"Now really, my dear, don't you think that is quite a remarkable letter for a boy of his age?"

"Very remarkable," answered Miss Carmel. "It does not sound like Billy at all. But I suppose boys' letters seldom do. I am glad to hear from him even like this. Now I must hurry home; for it is getting late, and I have been gone all day. Give my love to dear Mrs. Dayton and Dolly. Tell them I miss Billy-Boy almost as much as they do."

And, with a cheery good-bye to Miss van Doran, Miss Carmel patted Towser's head and turned homeward through the fading sunset, an odd, unspoken pain in her tender heart because in this remarkable letter there had been no message for her. Had Billy-Boy forgotten already,—forgotten like the rest of his race and

kind? The shadows of the old elms seemed to fall heavy upon her at the thought,—the old elms, under whose leafy boughs she had spent so many gay, happy girlish hours in the young years gone by,—the old elms whose dead leaves were drifting sere and yellow about her homeward way.

Suddenly there came a rustle and slow patter behind her and old Towser stalked to her side. Stiff and rheumatic as he was, he knew that his duty, as the dog of a gentleman and a Dayton, was to see this dear young lady safe home.

“Ah, Towser, — good old Towser!” And Miss Carmel broke into a soft, sad little laugh as she patted her gallant old friend’s grey head. “Faithful Towser! You at least don’t forget. Go back,—go back to your hearth-rug, Towser! I can take care of myself.”

But Towser refused to be dismissed; and together the two old friends walked on through the gathering shadows, until they reached the gates of Harrington Hall, where, after a good-night pat from his gentle young lady, Towser consented to stalk back to his bearskin rug again.

And, somewhat cheered by this little

incident, Miss Carmel tripped up the steps, to be cheered even more; for the mail that had been accumulating all day lay in full view on the hall table; and there, among the invitations to teas and dinners and bridge parties, lay a rough-scrawled envelope, which she caught up with an exclamation of surprise and delight.

"Billy! This can't be from Billy, too!"

But it was, as Miss Carmel saw, with dancing eyes, when she tore off the envelope, and glanced at the long pencil-scribbled page. No margin, no dates, no proper "epistolary correspondence" here! This was the sort of letter she wanted. This was from the *real* Billy she knew.

Dropping into the big carved chair under the swinging lamp, Miss Carmel read, with a returning glow in her chilled heart:

DEER, DEER MISS CARMEL—I've just done my letter to mama, and it took all morning. I had to look in the dickshonary so many times to spell rite and to put all the stops in place, for Jack says mothers ought not to be worried about anything when boys are so far away from home.

So after I coppied that letter over five times, I couldn't rite real good any more, but you said you didnt mind spelling or nuthing, and you dont worry like mothers; so I have just brought my pencil and pad out under the cottonwoods, to rite to you like I promised, and tell you everything about everybody out here.

It is a nice place, only the porch is broke down, and the fences shaky, and the cowshed roof is falling in; and mother would most faint if she saw the dust and spider webs, I know. There is no women to scrub or sweep; only Chang the cook, who wears a long pigtail, and spits on my collars when he irons them, which I do not like. Besides there is Ben Morris, that they call Bony Ben because he is so big and bony; and Pedro, who is Mexican and cant talk much English; and Daddy, who is to old to do anything but mend straps and plate lariats; and three other men who ride the range and swear dredful when they come home.

I had to wait a long time at Buckston, for Jack could not meet me. He had company at Bar Cross—galoots Ben called them—that staid all night; so he sent

Ben for me, and Ben broke open a store and cooked supper for me that was fine. And you must not tell mama, for I promised Jack I wouldnt rite to her about it. But Jack was real sick when I got to Bar Cross. He was so weak and shaky he couldnt stand up. And, O Miss Carmel, he looks bad! You mustnt tell mama, but his cheeks are almost as thin as Miss van Dorans, and his eyes have big sinks under them, and his mouth dont laugh at all. Its malaria he says,—not second day like Miss van Dorans, but its next morning malaria, they have out here. He takes soda water for it, which I do not think is as good as pills. But though he looks so sick, he is deer and good the same still. And he asked about everybody, and whether you were dead or married, and I said no, never; though you would look butiful in a vale and wreth like Molly Fealy's I know; but I hope you will not be dead or married till I get back home.

Jack is away on speshul business, he went with Mr. Bret who is his friend and comrade. But Mr. Bret cut Pedros arm with a whip, which was cruel I think. Pedro says some day he will kill him,

which I told him was a grate sin, but he did not understand. I do not think people understand about sin out here. They have no church or Sunday-school or anything to make them good. I wisht you were here to teach them, Miss Carmel; for you teach fine. I found your beads that you put in my pocket, and I say them as you told us the people did when the Turks were coming. I hope you will rite to me soon again, deer Miss Carmel.

I have lots more to tell about Pancha and Wichita who are Pedro's sisters, and who make drawn-work handkerchifs, which I will buy for you and mama if I have enuff money before I come home. And Daddy can make indian baskets that are grate. But I must close my letter, for Ben is waiting to take it with the other that I rote to mama. Give my love to everybody, Father Tom and Dick Fealy and Joe Slevin and all the boys, and Leo and Towser too. I hope Towser hasn't had any more fights with Mr. Ellis big Spot. Bulldogs dont fight fair, and Towser aint onto their mean tricks. I forgot to tell you to watch out for Spot, or he will tear Towser up some day, sure. Ben cant

wait any longer now, he says; so good-bye, dear Miss Carmel. I am

Affecshonately your trew friend,

BILLY.

Miss Carmel read this letter twice; and then, going up to her own pretty room, she closed and locked the door and read it again. Then—then she knelt down beside her bed, and, burying her face upon the snowy pillows, sobbed and wept as if her tender heart would break.

Billy's letter had told her far more than the young writer out at Bar Cross had dreamed. No "spelling or punctua-shun" could have made it clearer to Miss Carmel that all she had feared for the dear friend and playmate of happy days gone by was true,—that Jack, with his "next morning malaria," his sunken eyes and hollow cheeks, his new friends and comrades, was swiftly going the downward path that leads to ruin and destruction; and only Billy—innocent, unconscious Billy—was near to help and to save.

X.—THE NEW HOME.

SOMEHOW, it was growing a little dull at Bar Cross Ranch. Jack had been absent "on business" fully ten days. Billy had investigated everything within reach, and found much that was interesting. He had explored the banks of the Coyote Creek, threaded the shadowy depths of La Noche Cañon, scrambled up the rugged sides of Windy Mountain under Pedro's skilful guidance; he had been over the hill (as slope and range and peak were impartially called by Bony Ben), mounted on Marquita, to whose sure and dainty feet heights and depths were as safe as level ground; he had followed the trail into purple cloudlands, that grew into forests of green and banks of blossoms at his approach. He had spent a pleasant morning around the low adobe hut that was Pedro's home, watching the half-clad little *niños* frolicking, and the deft fingers of Pancha and Wichita busy with the beautiful Mexican drawn-work; while in the shed behind the house

old Grandmother Martina, brown and withered as a dry walnut, bent over her loom, from which came blankets of quaint pattern and wonderful rainbow hues.

It was old Martina who had cooked at Bar Cross long ago, and made the wonderful dulces which Billy's mamma still held in sweet memory. She had been a wise woman in her time, so Pedro confided to Billy; though she was old now—"ah, so old!" And Pedro shook his ten brown digits in the air repeatedly in his efforts to convey the old grandmother's inexpressible age to Billy's mind. But, despite her uncountable years, old Martina's sunken eyes were still bright and keen; the wits behind them were perhaps sharper than the younger wits around her; and she dyed her wools and wove her blankets by ways of her own that she had learned in the Padre's mission long, long ago.

Quite as entertaining in another way was old Daddy. What Daddy's real name was no one knew, and, according to the polite custom of the wild West, no one had ever ventured to inquire. He had drifted into Bar Cross about a dozen years before; and, finding it a rather

sheltered eddy in the stormy sea of life, decided to stay there indefinitely.

Daddy's accomplishments were without number. In his young days he could do anything, from setting a broken leg to carving a signet ring out of a peach stone. Now that his sight had somewhat failed and the rheumatics had stiffened his "jints," his activities were necessarily limited. But he could still mend straps and stirrups to be good as new; he could patch leather breeches and boots; he could plait lassos and lariats such as no rope-maker could twist and no money could buy. He could make pipes of clay and wood, also pouches and leggings. He could weave baskets; and, last but not least, he could play the jew's-harp,—aye, he could play at the same time two, three, a whole orchestra of jew's-harps of his own construction, softening the twanging notes into strange, sweet melody. When Daddy sat out under the cotton-woods at nightfall and played his jew's-harps, it seemed as if all the buzzing, droning, twittering things of the forest were blending in twilight song.

"My, I'd give a lot to play the jew's-

harp like that!" said Billy, as, the second day after Jack's departure, he listened admiringly to Daddy's spirited rendition of "The Arkansas Traveller." "Do you think you could ever teach me?"

Daddy removed his orchestra from his mouth and shook his grizzled head.

"I'm feard I couldn't, sonny. I'd like to fust-rate, but I jest nachelly can't. You see, the jew's-harp ain't like nothing else. The music comes from somewhere in folks innards, and can't be taught. Sort of like katydids and crickets, and you can't larn that."

"How did *you* learn, please?" asked Billy, who was seated on the stump of an old cottonwood, hugging his knees, while his brown eyes studied the old man's weather-beaten face.

"How did *I* larn?" chuckled Daddy. "Blamed, if I know, sonny. When you're pitched out in the world to sink or swim, you sort of catch on to most anything that comes your way."

"And were you pitched out in the world?" asked Billy, sympathetically.

"Well, rather," replied Daddy. "My folks was crossing the Divide in a prairie

schooner, and run into a band of Injus, and they rizzed the har of the whole outfit."

The past perusal of Dick Fealy's books enabled Billy to apprehend something of Daddy's meaning.

"Raised their hair! You mean the Indians killed and scalped everyone?" gasped the young listener.

"Most everyone," answered Daddy, calmly. "My mother crawled off into the sagebrush with me (so I've hearn: I was too little to know). At any rate, that's whar they found her dead, and me squealing like a steam whistle beside her. It was a half-breed hunter who got me and took me to his squaw."

"And—and then?" asked Billy, breathlessly, as Daddy, who was not given to autobiography, paused.

"Well, I tumbled around their cabin for a year or two, I reckon; and then they took the trail farther West, and they didn't want to bother with no strays; so they dropped me with an old French Padre who was out there to christianize them red devils."

"A priest you mean," asked Billy,—
"a Catholic priest?"

"Yes," answered Daddy. "Thar warn't no other kind of sky pilots pushing over the border then, you bet! Too risky. Pretty nigh the fust thing I remember clearly is old Père Jean teaching me to read out of a book with red letters in it. Them red letters took my fancy sure."

"And did you stay long?" asked Billy, as Daddy came to another stop in his narrative.

"Must have been quite a piece of time," answered the old man, reflectively. "For an eight-year-older, I learned a lot—spelling and reading and praying. And Père Jean christened me, and gave me the name of his own liking—Étienne. Most too heavy and furrin to hold to, so I dropped it later on. But sometimes now, when I'm dozing over my pipe, seems as if I heard old Père Jean's voice calling like he used to call through the pine woods: 'Étienne! Étienne! It is growing dark; the night is falling. Come home to your old father, Étienne!' He was good to me sure. It's a long time back to remember, but Père Jean was good to me. He'd have sent me off East to school and made something respectable of me;

but them blamed redskins that he was trying to make into decent Christians got into a row with another tribe. They had dug up the tomahawk, and was dancing the war dance; and I woke up one night to find the hull place ablaze, and the air full of war whoops; and Père Jean was lying dead, with his cross in his hands, whar he had gone out among the red devils to make peace."

"And then—and then?" Billy was now fairly athrill with excitement. "What happened then? Golly, you tell fine stories! Good as any book! Why, Père Jean was a martyr! I never knew anybody before who had been acquainted with a real martyr. People ought to know about him. I'll get pencil and paper to-morrow and write it all down, so I won't forget."

"No, you don't," said Daddy in alarm,—
"no, you don't, sonny! I don't talk for no writing down. Fust thing I know thar'd be trouble on my trail. I didn't know you was the writing kind, or I wouldn't hev talked at all."

"Oh, you're not going to stop your story!" said Billy, in dismay. "Why, you haven't half finished your experiences,

Daddy! You've only got up to when you were eight years old."

"That's far enough," answered Daddy, grimly,—“plenty far enough. After that it's best to forgit things,—a heap best to forgit. And it's getting late, and the chill sinks into my old bones after sundown, so we best go in sonny,—we best go in.”

And not another story could Billy draw from old Daddy that night.

But, of all the friends he was making in his new home, Billy felt that Bony Ben was alike his first and best. After Jack's departure, Ben had left his own shack, where he had everything to his rough simple fancy; and camped watchfully at the big house every night, to “keep an eye on the kid.” No persuasions from Dick, Dan or Toby, no rumors of a barbecue at Weaver's, or a shooting match at Dingley's corner, not even the regular monthly meeting of the Range Riders, could lure him from his post. And even through the busy day Billy was conscious that Ben was keeping an “eye” upon him.

“Don't let that Dago take you too far down the Gulch. Toby seen a wild cat thar yesterday. Best keep away from

that new camp 'cross Windy Mountain. It's a lot of lungers. Their cough is ketching, and town folks won't take them in. If I was you, I wouldn't hang around the stables too much. Dan and Toby does a lot of rough talking that them home folks of yourn wouldn't like you to hear."

And on the bright days when, mounted on Marquita, Billy rode with Ben over the hills, there was always a strong hand ready at the steep rough places, to grasp Marquita's bridle or turn her into safer ways.

So four, five, six, ten days passed and still Jack did not return. "He said he wouldn't stay very long," observed Billy, as he and Ben sat before the big fire that the chilling nights demanded. "But he can't help it, I suppose. There's a lot of business to do when your father is dead and you are head of the family, like Jack. And running a ranch takes a lot of money; don't it, Ben?"

"Rather considerable," assented Ben, as he puffed at his pipe.

"It took a lot last year, I know," continued Billy. "Mamma sat up one night with Miss van Doran doing sums

about it. Mamma isn't much on doing sums by herself; she always liked music better than arithmetic at school. But Miss van Doran went as far as trigonometry, and can do sums fine. And she went over all the accounts and bills and papers with mamma, and added and subtracted, and said she couldn't make things work out clear even with algebra, which works out with letters when figures won't go right at all. And mamma got a headache and cried, and said it was a dreadful thing to be a widow. But Jack was doing all right, she knew; and she couldn't worry him. She would sell the south lot to Colonel Woodville and pay all the bills next day."

"Hasn't your mother got no men folks with good hard sense around?" asked Ben, gruffly.

"No," answered Billy,—“only Uncle Martin; and he doesn't live at our house, but teaches Greek and Latin in a college in town. The only man in our family is Jack. But I'm growing up fast. I'll be thirteen in May. I'll be a man pretty soon; and then I'll help Jack run this place, and between us we'll strike

the old Curado lead that will make us billionaires."

"The Curado lead!" Ben took his pipe out of his mouth and stared at the young speaker. "What do you know about the Curado lead? It dropped down into worse than nothing twenty years ago. Your father lost a lot of money on it."

"I know," said Billy. "We've got maps about it at home. Dolly and I used to play geography with them up in the garret. There is a whole box of them that some one sent to mamma two years ago, and said he had cheated papa, and was making restitution. I suppose he had been to confession. When you go to confession you have to make restitution, even if it's only a box of old paper maps. But poor papa had been dead three years when the box of maps came. Mamma had no use for them, so Dolly and I used to play geography games with them. That's how I know all about the Curado lead. It was a big red-inked line on all of them,—bigger than anything on the map. It broke off on one side of Coyote Creek, and then started again in a line right through Bar Cross."

"It did?" said Ben, excitedly. "And right across the Southwest Ridge? I'll bet my bottom dollar that's what old Daddy's been a saying all this time, and everybody thought he was daffy. The Southwest Ridge! Laws, it takes a soft-eyed tenderfoot to strike things straight! It's the Southwest Ridge that them sharps Sandy Nick has in hand is trying to gull your brother into selling them for a sanitarium! A sanitarium, with the Curado lead brimming with pay dirt below it! Any other papers boxed up with them maps, sonny?"

"Yes," answered Billy; "but they were in Spanish, so nobody at home could read them."

"And can you git them?" asked Bony Ben, breathlessly. "Anybody at home with gumption enough to send them to you?"

"Why, yes!" answered Billy. "Dolly would roll them up and send them, I'm sure. What do you want with them?"

"Never you mind that, sonny. Keep your mouth shet tight about them maps till I tell you to open it. But send for them right now. Git pen and paper and

tell your folks you want them papers, and the maps most perticler. And we'll play a little geography game out here," concluded Bony Ben, with his grim chuckle. "I sort of think, sonny, that you and me have the cards to beat Sandy Nick and his sharpers yet."

XI.—AN EXCITING DAY.

THE letter to Dolly was written and addressed in Billy's best handwriting, and Ben was over the hills next morning to mail it before the young writer was up. This good friend and guardian had said he would be absent all day. Purchases of food and fodder and other supplies for the ranch had to be made monthly; for the neglected acres of Bar Cross, in these latter years, furnished no sustenance for either man or beast. Ben was doing his best; but Ben was neither farmer nor builder, and Daddy's busy days were done. So once a month Ben made the round of more thrifty ranches, and, with a shrewd eye for bargains, "stocked up."

It was a bright October day, snappy and breezy; and the bracing air of the mountain made Billy long for a canter on Marquita over the sunkissed hills. Already he felt the pulse of new life in his tingling veins, a growing strength in muscle and sinew; his cheeks were beginning to round and flush, his shoulders

to straighten vigorously. Dr. MacVeigh's tonic stood untouched on the mantel: it was no longer needed.

Billy was just in the mood for something exciting this morning, when, straying aimlessly toward the corral, he came upon Pedro transformed. Pedro's usual garb was as sober and scanty as propriety would permit,—a pair of jean trousers of no particular fit or fashion; a loose shirt, with many a rent in bosom and sleeve; a shapeless hat with a broken brim. But to-day Billy could only pause and stare in amazement at the figure that confronted him; for Pedro was in holiday attire, indeed,—an attire that, old and faded as it was, glittered with tinsel and buttons and tassels. Velvet breeches encased Pedro's slender legs; a velvet jacket, cut in numberless points, set off his slim figure; a red silk scarf was knotted around his waist, a red handkerchief tied about his throat; his hat was turned up on the side with a paste buckle that held a turkey feather.

"Golly!" exclaimed Billy, as soon as he could find voice. "Who dressed you up like that?"

Though the two friends still found their Spanish-American conversation somewhat confusing, they had begun to understand each other better. The friendly comradeship of the little señor was an ever-growing delight to Pedro.

He nodded and smiled now, in evident pride at Billy's amazement.

"I dress fine? Yes, yes, little señor! It is that I go to Las Rocas to-day to *la fiesta*—what you call it? Ze good time,—great good time at Las Rocas to-day, at ze dance, ze race, ze eat, ze drink, ze market, what you call it? Everyting fine, bully, great!" concluded Pedro, waving his hands gleefully.

"A market?" repeated Billy. "I guess you mean a fair?"

"*Si, señor*: fair, very fair! Ze tepees, ze horse-races—all very fair. I go to sell ze blanket, ze lacework, ze baskets. I get big money, little señor!"

And by dint of much nodding and gesticulation, Pedro at last made Billy understand that once a year, when the summer was past, and the grain and fruit had ripened, and the moon was round and yellow, there was a festive

gathering at the little village of Las Rocas, across the hills,—a gathering that dated back to the time when Americanos had no place or right in the land of the Indian and the *conquistador*.

As well as Billy could gather from Pedro's broken but voluble narration, the feast at Las Rocas was a primitive combination of Thanksgiving and country fair. The natives gathered from miles around. There were shooting matches and racing and other games. There was a lottery, in which were drawn prizes as high as ten *pesos*. There was much cooking and feasting; and camp fires blazed out at night; and the old braves, wrapped in their blankets, told stories of wars and buffalo hunts of long ago.

All this had been at Las Rocas in the past, but now there was much more. In the "tepees," that once had been only for shelter, the women sold blankets and rugs and beadwork and drawn-work: moccasins, pouches, belts, baskets, and pottery,—all the Indian handiwork that drew dollars from the pockets of the Americanos who came to see and buy. And because no one, in all the Coyote

county, could weave blankets so gay and wonderful as old Grandmother Martina, or could make the lace and drawn-work so beautiful as Pancha and Wichita, Pedro, in the fine clothes that had been his father's, was going to Las Rocas to sell the family output, and bring home many dollars for the family needs.

"My, wouldn't I like to go with you!" said Billy, eagerly. "I never in my life saw a real Indian or a tepee or a squaw or—or anything. I wish I could go too."

"Go!—the little señor go to Las Rocas!" Pedro's eyes sparkled, and all his holiday buttons and tassels jingled and quivered with delight. "Go! Why not, little señor,—why not?"

Why not indeed? Had not Jack given him Pedro as companion and guide? Was not pretty Marquita in the stable awaiting his will? Ben was away. A vague, uneasy doubt as to what Ben would say to this expedition crossed Billy's mind, but vanished in the flood of persuasive eloquence flowing in broken English from Pedro's lips. The little señor could go, of course. It would be Pedro's joy and pleasure and pride to have him. The road was good,

the day was fine; there would be wonderful things to see, to hear,—shooting, wrestling. “Long Arm,” the strong brave of the Utes, would be there to throw all who came; and there would be tortillas and tamales. And Predo rolled off a menu that, half understood, appealed irresistibly to Billy’s expanding appetite.

“I think I’ll go,” he answered conclusively. “It will be dreadfully dull staying at the Ranch all alone; for Chang and Daddy don’t have much to say. So, if it isn’t too far—”

“Far!—too far! Ah, *Santa Maria*, no, not too far at all!” declared Pedro.

So it was settled, and in a few moments the two were mounted,—Billy on the pretty Marquita, and Pedro on Diaz, a sturdy little mustang. The men, Dan and Dick and Toby, were off on the range to-day; there was only old Daddy, plaiting his lariat in the morning sunshine, to witness the young riders’ departure, as, waving their hands to him in merry adieu, they took the road to the creek and the cabin where Pedro was to gather up his merchandise,—the gay blanket, the two smaller bedside rugs, the box of hand-

kerchiefs and doilies and tablecloths, over which Pancha and Wichita had been working for many a long month.

It was quite a momentous occasion; and Billy found the little home by the Coyote in a hubbub of excitement as old Martina, her sunken eyes flashing with pride, made a final display of her work to a group of admiring neighbors.

"Ah, *Santa Maria*, they are beautiful! Never have we seen anything like them,—the rugs, the blankets are of a splendor beyond words," the visitors all agreed.

"They should bring ten, twenty, thirty dollars!" the old woman declared in shrill triumph.

"Thirty dollars!" gasped Pedro. "It is impossible,—impossible!"

"Thirty!" repeated the woman. "It is the pattern of the rising sun and the rainbow that only Martina can weave. For what do I sit at the loom all the weary day long? For what do I make the dyes that no other woman knows? For what have I kept the secrets of my mother and my grandmother? It must be thirty dollars!"

A wild clamor of argument and dispute,

with much waving of arms and hands, followed this announcement. *Thirty dollars!* Surely the old mother had gone mad! *Thirty dollars!* Pedro could never get such a sum. *Thirty dollars!* Caramba! he would not be fool enough to take the rugs and blanket at all, expecting such a price.

"What's the trouble?" asked Billy, as, quite unable to comprehend the discussion, he saw Pedro shake his head and fling out his hands in the apparent despair of one whose last hope has failed.

Pedro explained as clearly as excitement would permit that the old grandmother had lived too long: her head was turned, her wits were gone. She demanded that he sell her rugs and blanket for thirty dollars! *Thirty dollars* would buy a horse; it would buy two cows; it might even, in a domestic emergency, buy a house. *Thirty dollars!* Not even the rich Americanos would pay such a price for blanket or rugs.

"They wouldn't!" exclaimed Billy, who had seen and heard of the Indian rugs in Colonel Woodville's study. "I know a man who paid twice as much, and even bragged he got them at a bargain. *Thirty*

dollars! Why, that's dirt cheap! Take them along, Pedro. You can get all that for them, I know."

Old Martina understood a little English, and, through the excited protests of her family, the confident boyish tone reached her ear.

"*Si, si!*" she cried. "It is as I said. The little señor knows. Ah, if he goes to Las Rocas with Pedro all will be right! He can talk to the Americanos; and they will pay the thirty dollars, that old Martina may eat and be warm."

"You bet they will!" said Billy, expanding now with new importance; for when had he ever before been called upon to decide a commercial matter? "You'll get every bit of thirty dollars, if anybody knows what's what."

"*Si, si!* It is as I said. The little señor knows."

And then the clamor rose again, with old Martina nodding and gesticulating in the midst of it, until suddenly she broke off and laid her brown skinny hand on Billy's sleeve.

"I will do it, little señor, for you,—I will do it. Come! Come you, Pedro, too;

come!" And she drew Billy back from the living room, where the rest of the family cooked and worked and ate and slept into a little bedchamber that was Martina's own, and was kept ready for the grandmother's "dying," which could not be a very distant event now. The bed was neatly made, with lace-trimmed sheets and pillow. There was a little table, covered with a spotless cloth, on which were a brass crucifix and two candles. A Madonna, gay with tinsel and artificial flowers, stood upon a shelf near by.

But Martina was not thinking of her last hour now. Diving under the bed with an activity that belied her fourscore years, she dragged out an old chest battered and worn, but with clamps and hinges of real silver.

"*Santa Maria!*" gasped Pedro, as the old woman pulled forth a key that she wore hung around her neck. Unlocking this guarded treasure, she cautiously drew out its contents: a jacket of blue velvet embroidered in silver, knee-breeches to match, leggings of deerskin wrought with wonderful traceries of vines and flowers, a wide felt hat looped up with a silver

chain. One by one Martina spread these glittering garments on the bed, with the air of one making a solemn and supreme sacrifice; then, stretching out her arm and turning to Billy, she broke into a flood of excited language. All that Billy could comprehend was,

“For you, little señor,—for you,—for you!”

“*Santa Maria!*” murmured Pedro again, as if he could not believe his own ears or eyes.

“What does she mean?” asked Billy, as the old woman began another excited rhapsody in her own tongue.

Then Pedro recovered wits and voice, and broke into delighted explanation:

“For you, little señor; for you to wear to Las Rocas; the clothes of Tio José, my uncle that died.”

“*Si, si!*” added Martina, her old voice quavering. “My José, my little José, my one only; no other boy. Four, five, six girls, little señor; but one only boy. For this, in my pride, my joy; I make these so fine clothes for my one only boy, who die and never wear them. See!”—she held up the leggings and jacket and

breeches, and showed their delicate needlework. "No hidalgo could have finer. All these years have I kept these clothes of my José, and let no one touch them. Little señor, they shall be yours, to wear to the Las Rocas to-day, that you may look fine and handsome and brave, as the son of your lady mother should not look dull and dark like this." And Martina laid her hand upon the grey sweater which Billy wore on his mountain rides, and shook her head in solemn disapproval.

Through the old woman's mixed jargon, light broke at last upon Billy.

"You mean I am not dressed right,—that I must put on those clothes?" he asked eagerly.

"*Si, si, señor,*" cried Pedro, delightedly. "It is as the old grandmother says: it would be a shame for the little señor to go to the *fiesta* in so sad, so ugly, so poor a jacket when he can have Tio José's clothes. Put them on, little señor!" pleaded Pedro under his breath. "Put them on quickly, or the grandmother may change and lock them up in the chest again. Put them on, and let us be gone."

And, as Billy made no protest, Pedro

proceeded hurriedly to remove the sad and sober garments, and substitute those of Tio José; old Martina assisting with trembling fingers until every button and cord and tassel, glittering brightly still in spite of long years of seclusion, was in proper place; and Billy stood transformed into a gallant, graceful, dashing, dazzling little figure that did not seem our "Billy-Boy" at all.

XII.—AT LAS ROCAS.

EVERY eye was fixed on Billy-Boy as he stood at the doorway, feeling a little queer and sheepish, it must be confessed, in Tio José's holiday garb. But he was speedily reassured by the rapturous commendations rising on all sides.

"Never was there anything more elegant, more beautiful!" said Pancha. "The little señor looks like a hidalgo, like a prince."

"Now, indeed, is he fitted to go to Las Rocas as become the noble Americanos who own the wild lands of the Coyote," added Wichita. "Old Martina would have gone to her grave in remorse and shame if she had permitted the son of Billy's lady-mother to appear at a *fiesta*, without holiday dress, when the clothes of Tio José were just of his size and shape. No, no! It never would have done! It would be a shame and disgrace!"

So Billy, who was fast learning to accept much that he could not understand in this new life, resigned himself

to his borrowed plumes quite cheerfully, especially after a glance in the cracked mirror which Pancha hurriedly brought forward, and which showed him a jaunty little figure much to his taste.

All preliminaries being thus settled, and the rugs and other salables packed safely, the two boys mounted their ponies and proceeded on their way. It was a long way and a very rough way, as Billy soon discovered. It was well for him that Marquita was careful and sure-footed.

The road, passable at first to ordinary mountain travel, afterward turned into a trail that had to be taken Indian file. Pedro went first, Diaz scrambling up and down rocky steeps, rounding dizzy ledges, wading mountain streams; while Marquita followed, picking her way in dainty disapproval, but never missing a step. Before they were an hour out, Billy felt convinced that Ben would not have agreed to this adventure; but it was now too late to withdraw.

At last, after a three hours' journey, the young riders turned a curve in the mountain, and Pedro cried triumphantly:

"Las Rocas, little señor! Look! It is there below."

And Billy looked, and forgot all his doubts and fears in the novel sight; for Las Rocas was a lively scene that day.

The little Indian village lay in a mountain pass where great walls of rock, rent asunder in some prehistoric convulsion of nature, formed a sort of rude gateway that had given the place its name. The shriek of the steam whistle had never reached Las Rocas; telegraph and telephones were unknown; neither coach nor automobile could there find passageway. The only approaches to it were old trails made by the Indians before the white man had come to claim these Western hunting grounds. So, after a fashion, the Indians still held Las Rocas for their own. Queer little cabins and huts clung like birds'-nests to the mountainside; there were tepees, brown and tattered with the storms and winds; but, best of all for the present purpose, there was La Calle, a long stretch of level ground, once perhaps the bed of a mountain torrent that had torn its fierce way

through these encircling cliffs and lost itself in some greater stream beyond, leaving only the little spring trickling into its stone basin to tell of the strength and beauty that had passed.

But La Calle was a lively scene to-day, with new tepees that had felt neither sun nor storm; booths arched with green boughs, and tables covered with gay cloths and awnings; while up and down the width and length of La Calle, through the booths and tepees, around the tables and the spring, moved a motley throng,—Indians, old and young; squaws with their papposes, young braves gay in wampum strings and feathers; cowboys, herders, rancheros, red men, white men, yellow men, brown men.

It was such a gathering as Billy had never seen before; for tin horns were blowing, drums were beating, shrill voices calling. A very Babel of sound swelled up to the young riders on the trail above. Billy, who was rather tired and hungry after his long trip, felt a thrill of delighted surprise. No circus that had ever set up dazzling attractions in Holmhurst football field could compare to this.

"Do you pay to get in?" he asked, glad that, even in the excitement of his change of garments, he had thought to transfer his purse with its three dollars to Tio José's velvet pocket.

"Pay, little señor? No, no, no!" replied Pedro. "Come, now, I take you in. Pay? No, no!"

And the speaker, who evidently knew the ways of Las Rocas, guided his companion down the steep road, snapped his fingers to a couple of barelegged Indian boys, who came running up to take care of the ponies; so the riders dismounted and the agent of old Martina proceeded to unload his merchandise.

While Pedro was haggling with some of the booth-owners for a place to display his stock, Billy looked around him with interest. He had attended his home county fair last year, in company with Dick Fealy, whose bantam chickens had taken a prize; but, even with the exhilarating companionship of a prize-winner, the county fair of civilization was a very tame thing compared to this. Wrestling, shooting, racing-matches were in full swing. The strong man of the Utes, looking like

a copper-colored figure in his full undress, was doing up a writhing opponent with murderous skill, to the grunting approval of the Indian spectators. Men were trading and swapping horses, playing cards, pitching quoits, throwing dice,—shouting, chattering, disputing, swearing in half a dozen languages. With the exception of the dozen or so squaws seated behind the blanket and rugs they had brought for sale, no ladies were in evidence, —another contrast to Billy's home fair, where the gentler sex took prizes for everything, from patchwork quilts to poodle dogs.

After a short stroll through the line of booths and tents, Billy returned, to find Pedro standing somewhat despairingly behind his rugs and lacework. The old squaw, who had consented to their display in her tepee, had been most discouraging. Pedro thus put the case in his pigeon English:

"It is the bad luck year this, old Concha says. No rich Americanos come to buy. All day since sunrise she has waited and sold nothing, nothing! Only ze *vendedors*—what you call ze Yankee

peddlers—come to ask what price, that they may buy and sell again. They will not even pay ten pesos, Concha says. Caramba! Never will I sell ze rugs of my grandmother to such robbers!”

“No, don’t,” said Billy, who had learned that a peso meant a dollar. “Stand up for your grandmother’s price, Pedro. Why, Colonel Woodville paid twice or three times as much for the rug in his house, I know!”

“*Si, si, señor*” agreed Pedro, taking courage from this assured opinion. “We will stand up, as you say.”

But it was vain for the young merchant to “stand up”: the *vendedors*, shrewd, keen-eyed dealers, had come out of the usual ways of transportation, to find bargains; and, though they recognized the value of old Martina’s work, they laughed at the price. Three, four, five, half a dozen made offers that Pedro scornfully refused as altogether beneath his notice; though in truth, the brave heart under his gay holiday jacket was beginning to fail. He had sold the drawn-work of Pancha and Wichita at a fair price; it was light and dainty enough to be sent

to Eastern shops and homes for a few postage stamps, and visitors bought readily; but selling the rugs of his grandmother was quite another affair. It looked as if they were going to dead-weight all his holiday hopes; as if there would be no "good time" for old Martina's young agent, whose one gala day seemed destined to be a cruel disappointment, after all.

Billy, who had taken another turn around the place and seen most of its sights, came back to the booth, to find Pedro saying very bad Spanish words under his breath. Old Concha had given up and sold out to the *vendedor* at his own robber's price. It seemed truly that he must do the same.

"No," said Billy, who had the business head of his own shrewd father under his boyish curls; "don't let them *do* you, too, Pedro. Stand to your old grandmother's price. Here, you go round and have a little fun; let me take your place. Maybe you can't make them understand. If they are Yankees, as you say, I can talk to them straight."

And Pedro, who knew that his own talk

had been neither straight nor convincing, gladly agreed to this proposal, and hurried off in delight to see some of the "good times" for which he had hoped, leaving the little señor in Tio José's holiday garb to attend to business.

He had not very long to wait for it. In a few moments the *vendedors*, by their speech and manners Americanos, drew near talking earnestly.

"This is the place," said one. "I have just cleaned out the old woman, who had some pretty fair stuff for sale, but nothing like this. In fact, there is nothing like these rugs on the market. They get up cheaper things now, to suit the Eastern demand. These are fine, as you see,—the oldtime dyes and patterns that you don't get at any price. If you are looking for something first class, you can't do better than take this boy's rugs. You can get fifty dollars for that large one anywhere."

"Fifty?" repeated the other excitedly. "Why, it's a fac-simile of one in Mrs. Senator Grayson's hall, that she told me I could match for her at any price. What does the young greaser ask for it?"

"Most anything you'll give, I guess," laughed the other. "He was standing on thirty dollars for three a while ago, but I rather think by this time he has weakened. Offer him twenty for the bunch, and you'll get them, I'm sure."

"Oh, he will, eh? Not much!" thought Billy, with a sparkle in his brown eye. Every word of the speakers, who believed their conversation was quite beyond the seeming "greaser's" understanding, had reached the little señor's ear.

"Why, halloo!" The first *vendedor* became suddenly aware that the velvet-clad figure behind old Martina's rugs was not the same with whom he had bargained.

"Where's the other chap?" he asked in Spanish.

"I speak English," said Billy-Boy.

"The dickens you do!" said the *vendedor*.

"Pedro left me here in his place to sell his grandmother's rugs. People can fool him because he does not understand English; but I do, you see." And Billy looked up at the *vendedors* with his boyish smile.

The two men looked at each other for a moment, then burst into a hearty laugh.

"Who are you, anyhow? And what are

you doing dressed up like that?" said the first *vendedor*, good-humoredly.

"I'm Billy Dayton from Bar Cross Ranch, where Pedro works for my brother. His old grandmother lent me these clothes that belonged to her dead boy. She said I must dress up like this to come here. She is very poor," continued Billy; "and it takes a long time to make a rug, her fingers are so crooked and shaky now. She works sometimes from daylight to dark, and she is more than eighty years old. I don't think she will be able to make many more."

"She won't, indeed!" was the quick reply. "You've got us all around, lad. What will you take for the lot?"

Billy made a rapid computation in mental arithmetic that did credit to Miss van Doran's teaching.

"Sixty dollars," he answered briefly,— "forty for the big rug, and ten apiece for the little ones."

"Sixty dollars!" echoed the *vendedor*, angrily. "Take thirty, and be glad to get it! Sixty dollars! You don't know what you are talking about, boy!"

"Oh, yes, I do!" answered Billy, cheer-

fully. "I've seen Indian rugs before, at home at Colonel Woodville's. Mrs. Senator Grayson is his sister; you said she would pay any price for one like this. I could take it back to-night, you know," said Billy confidentially, "and write Colonel Woodville that old Martina has got just what his sister wants, and—"

A fierce oath burst from the *vendedor's* lips, but his companion clapped him on the shoulder.

"Done!" he exclaimed, laughing,—
"done brown, Phillips! The youngster has the drop on us."

"We won't trouble you to go into any correspondence, kiddie," said the other. "Sixty dollars, cash down!" (He drew out a well-stuffed wallet.) "There's your price. Count it out, and be sure of it; for a hard-headed, soft-hearted financier, Billy Dayton, you have any salesman I know beaten to a frazzle."

XIII.—BOB BRYCE.

WHILE Billy was disposing of old Martina's rugs, Pedro was enjoying his belated holiday,—taking in the free shows and cautiously investing a few pennies where pennies were necessary. Las Rocas was growing livelier and noisier as the day wore on. The venders of "pulque," the native wine, were doing a brisk business, with the usual results. Gambling and betting were becoming louder and more reckless.

About three o'clock a group of riders came galloping down the trail that led from the Jig Saw mining camp some fifteen miles distant. With these hilarious newcomers was a boy of about thirteen, long and lean in build, with restless black eyes full of life and mischief, but lips that were thin and hard and—old.

As he sprang from his pony—the little Indian horse boys were very busy now,—one of the older men called to him:

"Look out for yourself, Bobby! I'm not answering to your father for this lark. I told you not to come."

"Bah! Granny!" answered Bobby, with an ugly smile on his lips. "Talk like that to some kid who hasn't cut his eye-teeth,—not to me, Davy Drum!"

"You're sharp as they're made, I know," answered Dave, gruffly, — "so sharp you ain't safe to handle; and I ain't handling you. The Judge knows his own business, I reckon; but if you were my boy—well, you wouldn't have the swing you've got now, sure!"

"I don't happen to be your boy, so you may as well hold your jaw, Davy. As for Dad knowing his business, he has given me a loose rein too long to haul me up now, though he talks of trying it."

"Good!" said Dave. "But I'm afraid it will take a tough strap to hold you."

"He's got it, he thinks," answered the boy, his face darkening. "There's a lot of fools been croaking about me, and I'm to be shipped to the Western Military Institute, that's about as close to State prison as respectable boys get. Guardhouse and hard-tack if you break the rules."

"Good again!" said Dave. "I thought the Judge had some head filling under his grisly thatch. When are you going?"

Bobby lifted his black eyes to his questioner's face, and smiled again his hard, cold smile.

"Never!" he answered briefly. "That's all you need know, Davy, when I'm found missing; so don't ask any more fool questions."

"You mean you'll cut and run?" said Davy, coolly. "Most too young for that game, sonny. Besides, it takes money."

"I've got it," said Bobby, with a flash of his black eyes.

"Where?" asked the other quickly.

Bobby put his hand in his pocket and drew out five dollars in silver.

Davy burst into a relieved laugh.

"You can go the limit on that? Blamed if I wasn't afraid you had been holding up somebody! I believe you're equal to it. If you can dodge the paternal grip on five dollars, you're even sharper than I thought."

"I can make this five dollars fifty," said Bobby; "and I mean to do it."

"Oh, you can, eh?" laughed Dave again. "Try it!"

"What will you bet I can't?" asked Bobby, his black eyes sparkling.

He had struck a weak point now. Betting was something Davy could not resist.

"Well, considering your age and your size, and what you are likely to run up against at Las Rocas, I think it's safe to say I'll double the money. But remember: if you lose you'll have to go home quiet with me, and cut out all that fool talk about breaking away from your daddy."

"Done!" said Bobby. "That's a bargain, then. If I lose I go back with you to Dad and his Military Institute; and if I make my five dollars fifty, you double the money. You're out, Davy. I'm off to win!"

And, with a mocking wave of his hand, the boy darted away.

Davy looked after him anxiously.

"If ever there was a little devil born, it's that Bobby Bryce. I oughtn't to have bet with him. But, then, he can't do anything here. A kid like him pitched against these card sharks! They'll skin him head to heels. Fifty dollars! Thunderation! I'd be safe betting him five hundred; and though it ain't any of my business to tether him, I'll hold him to

his word sure. He goes back to his Dad to-night, if I have to lasso him."

And, with this determination, honest Davy, who was a big, good-humored fellow of about twenty-five, dismissed Bobby from his mind, and proceeded to enjoy himself with more congenial friends.

With his black eyes sharp and restless, Bobby made his way through the crowd, wondering how and where he should first try his luck; for gambling and betting were in full swing now; and, young as the boy was, he had learned many a knavish trick with cards that would have befitted a professional gamester. He must win, he resolved, setting his lips in their old hard lines; he must win this evening, at any cost. Davy would hold him to his wager, he knew; it was a point of honor with such rude, simple men. He would double his money, if it took his last cent. And he would hold Bobby to his word, too, as surely. If he should lose, there would be no escape from that young giant's keen eye and strong hand. Bobby would be taken back to his father without mercy,—that indulgent father who had been roused

out of his foolish fondness at last, and had determined to save and reform his boy.

Only last week Judge Bryce, who held large interests in the Jig Saw Mine, had been shocked by the refusal of a prominent academy to receive his son, whose example, the principal declared, was most pernicious to boys of his age. And with this announcement had come revelations of Bobby's last year's escapades, that had made the fond father grow strong and stern. He had brought Bob to the mine with him, in order to keep him under his eye until he could make final arrangements for his entrance to the Military Institute. But a telegram this morning had unexpectedly called the Judge to Denver, and he had left Bobby sulky but, as he imagined, safe in the mining camp until his return. Then had come the sudden fancy of the younger men in the camp to visit Las Rocas, and Bob's determination to accompany them,—a determination which big Davy, who had a friendly regard for "the little devil," vainly tried to gainsay.

So Bobby found himself at Las Rocas in the thick of the gaming, clamoring,

drinking crowd; his heart full of angry revolt against his father's will, his keen wits alert, his black eyes watchful for some chance of escape, however reckless or daring that chance might be. With a hundred dollars in his pocket, he could cut and run—where or how he did not stop to think, but away forever from the stern discipline of the Military Institute.

He peered into several tents, paused irresolutely at several gaming tables. Play was running high; the players looked keen and hard-faced as they swept in the stakes. Bobby knew that he and his five dollars would be "small fry" indeed to such sharks as these. Feeling hot and dry after his long ride over the hills, he turned to the stone water-basin where an old Indian squaw was selling some soft drinks made of herbs and roots, and dispensed from big jars of native pottery which she kept cooling in the trickling spring.

As Bobby drank from the gourd she extended to him, his quick ear caught an excited exclamation behind him:

"Sixty dollars? Sixty? But it is im-

possible! Sixty, little señor? You have it for true, for sure?"

"Right here," answered another youthful voice, confidently,—“sixty dollars in good hard cash. And you had better take it, Pedro, and buckle it safe in that leather pouch of yours; for I don't like to trust to your Tio José's velvet pocket.”

“Little señor, yes, yes! Put it here safe.” The first speaker's voice trembled with surprise and delight. “Sixty dollars! It will turn the old grandmother's head with joy. Sixty dollars! Caramba!”

Bobby turned cautiously to look at the speakers: two slight Mexican boys, apparently in the gayest of holiday dress. The black eyes scornfully took in every detail of the silver buttons and broidery. Such a monkey rig relegated its wearers at once to a class for which this young Americano felt only contempt. But these two “greasers” had somehow got hold of sixty dollars. Sixty dollars!

Bobby took another gourd full of the old Indian woman's root beer, and lingered to hear more.

“Your *vendedors* couldn't do me,” the second speaker was saying jubilantly. “I

understood their English, and heard them say what the rugs were worth. And now, Pedro, let us go back; for we have a long ride before us, and it is getting late."

"*Si, señor,—si!*" replied Pedro, eagerly. "We will go home at once."

Go home with the sixty dollars they had picked up somehow! Sharp-witted Bobby Bryce had no chance. Go home, and leave him here empty-handed to lose his wager! "No," resolved the black-eyed listener,— "no, you don't!" And, as Pedro and Billy turned hurriedly to leave, Bobby contrived a collision that knocked the gourd from his own hand and sent the contents streaming over his neat tweed suit.

"Oh, I beg pardon!" exclaimed Billy, in dismay. "I'm awful sorry I turned so quick. I didn't see you."

"It doesn't matter," said Bob, pleasantly. "It will all brush off, I guess. It's right good stuff. Won't you try some? Trade seems dull with the old lady, and I'll stand the treat."

"No, no!" answered Billy, charmed with such good nature. "I must do the treating, after spoiling your clothes,—that is, if

it isn't wine," he added quickly; "I never drink anything like wine."

"White Ribboner, eh?" said his new acquaintance.

"No," replied Billy. "We all took the pledge, when we were confirmed last year, not to taste any strong drink until we were twenty-one."

There was nothing stronger than sassafras tea in old Miguela's brew, but Bobby's present aim was to prolong the conversation and acquaintance.

"Good!" he said, smiling his hard old smile, though his black eyes danced youthfully.

"Then suppose we cut out the old woman's beer and try some of the hot chocolate in the booth yonder?"

It was quite impossible to resist such friendly overtures; so the three boys went to the booth in question, and Billy treated to hot chocolate, rich and sweet and milled to a delicious brown foam; also to the crisp little cakes made of pounded nuts and honey, which were very good indeed.

And, as everyone knows, there is nothing like a treat to promote pleasant social

intercourse. Before the first cup of chocolate was half finished, Bobby had learned that Billy was no "greaser," but Master William Dayton, of Bar Cross Ranch, who, dressed up in Tio José's holiday garments, had come to Las Rocas to dispose of old Martina's Indian rugs, for which he had just received the amazing sum of sixty dollars. And Bobby, with due reservation as to his past and future, allowed Billy to know that he had come over from the Jig Saw Mine, of which his father was part owner; and that his name was Bob Bryce.

Bob Bryce? Billy cocked his head reflectively at the name. Where had he heard it before? Bob Bryce?

"It seems as if I have seen you or heard of you somewhere," he said.

"Oh, no!" answered Bob, hastily. "For I never met you or heard of you, I am sure. I've heard people speak of your brother, though. He's a winner sure."

"Yes," said Billy, proudly. "I suppose everybody out here knows Jack. There are not many fellows like him."

"You're right there," assented Bobby,

with a wicked sparkle in his eyes,—“not many indeed!”

“I suppose he’ll be Senator or Governor, or something big, if he stays out here long enough,” continued Billy, warming up confidentially to this sympathetic listener. “That’s what mother is looking for. He is just like Great-grandfather Dayton, who was governor, and whose statue is now in the State House Square.”

Bobby, who had heard a good deal about Rackety Jack, smiled grimly. Here was a “sucker,” indeed, right to his hand. But something in the clear, innocent gaze of Billy’s brown eyes was rather discouraging. Bob scarcely knew how to tackle a boy who had taken the pledge at Confirmation and was blessedly unconscious of the doings of Rackety Jack. It was as if some radiance about Miss Carmel’s Billy hurt and dazzled Bob’s evil eye. But Pedro,—Pedro was another sort; Pedro, who had the sixty dollars buttoned in his leather pouch; Pedro, whose eyes were dancing and pulses thrilling with all the triumph of a new-made millionaire. Pedro, once lured away from his boyish

guardian, could be fooled and fleeced like a mountain sheep.

"And now we had better be off, Pedro," said Billy, as they finished their chocolate.

"Oh, don't be in such a hurry," interposed Bob quickly. "You won't get a chance to see anything like this again in a hurry. There is talk of cutting it all out next year. Have you been to the Snake-Charmer's Cave yet?"

"The Snake - Charmer's Cave? No. Where is it?" asked Billy.

"Just over there behind the rocks. The Indians say he is fully three hundred years old, and his cave stretches miles and miles beneath the mountain; and when he plays his pipe, the snakes come from far and near. He has a whole ring of rattlers dancing around him now."

"Golly!" exclaimed Billy, roused to lively interest in a picture that seemed to outclass all the "wild West" stories in Dick Fealy's bookshelf. "I wouldn't like to miss that. Come, Pedro, let us see the Snake-Charmer before we go."

XIV.—A BAD BOY'S GAME.

PEDRO was rapturously ready to go anywhere his little señor should suggest, so the three boys were soon making their way to the Snake-Charmer's Cave. It lay some distance back from the little Indian village, and was quite as horrible as any one in search of sensations could desire.

How far the cave stretched into the mountains was a matter of legend; all that was visible was a deep, dark hollow, surrounded by jagged rocks, where the Snake-Charmer, a withered old Indian, crouched with half-closed eyes, while he blew feebly upon a reed pipe that made strange, mournful music; and writhing, twisting, coiling about him were snakes of every size and kind, from the big copperhead that wriggled about his neck to the shining little adders that gleamed around his ankles.

A breathless crowd was watching the hideous sight. Billy had to squeeze in with some difficulty before he could look down into the Snake-Charmer's hollow,

that was safely guarded by its rude walls of rock. One glance was enough; for Billy-Boy turned sick and cold with horror. He had never before been at close quarters with a snake of any kind; and this wriggling, writhing mass awoke some natural antipathy, of which he had been hitherto unconscious. It seemed for a moment as if he must reel forward and plunge into the horrible depths below him.

"Let—let me get out of here!" he gasped, as, white and dizzy, he tried to force his way back through the pressing crowd.

"Too much for you, eh?" said a friendly voice, and Billy was conscious of a strong supporting hand on his arm. "It's rather stiff for me too, so we'll get out together."

And the speaker, a big blue-eyed giant in the easy garb of a miner, half drew, half lifted Billy out of the Snake-Charmer's crush into the freshness and freedom of the piny ridge beyond.

"George! you're white about the gills! Better take a swig of this." And he held a pocket flask to the pale-faced boy.

"No," said Billy, rallying. "I'm—I'm all right now. I never before was so close

to anything so horrid. Thank you very much for helping me out. I was so dizzy I couldn't see."

"Sort of staggered me too, I must say," laughed the big man. "It's the old Bible story, I reckon. There's something against nature in a snake, and when you get them in reels like that—but we won't talk any more about it. Still, I've seen humans that were a deal worse than snakes, sonny. Sure you are all right now?"

"Oh, yes, yes!" answered Billy. "But I'm not going to fool around here any longer. I am going home."

"Where is 'home'?" asked his new acquaintance.

"Bar Cross Ranch, on the Coyote," replied Billy.

"Don't know your Ranch, for I'm a newcomer out here. But you're a long way from the Coyote sure; so you'd better make tracks, unless you want night to hit you on the trail." And, with a pleasant nod, Davy (for it was the big man from the Jig Saw Mine that had befriended Billy) turned away to finish up the sights and shows of Las Rocas before dark.

"He is right," thought Billy, anxiously.

"I'll get Pedro and start for home. We ought to have gone an hour ago."

But to "get Pedro" was not the simple thing the little señor had thought. In vain he skirted the crowd still pressing about the Snake-Charmer's Cave, whose attractions his companions must surely have exhausted by this time; in vain he loitered on the return way to Las Rocas, scanning every passing group; in vain he peered into tent and booth: neither Pedro nor Bob Bryce was visible.

And the revelry was growing wilder and noisier every moment. The pulque was doing its maddening work. Men were swearing, quarrelling, fighting, and the day was drawing to a close. Billy, a lone little figure, wandered through Las Rocas, looking for Pedro, who seemed to have been swallowed up by the earth.

"He never would have gone off without me," thought Billy, striving to master the growing terror in his heart, as he realized his utter helplessness if thus abandoned. "He couldn't leave me like this."

But, to be fully reassured on this point, he betook himself to the temporary corral where the little Indian boys were

guarding the horses. He drew a breath of relief. Pretty Marquita and sturdy little Diaz stood safely tethered side by side. Marquita gave a restless whinny as Billy patted her neck. It was time to be off, she knew.

"You have this pony?" asked the Indian boy, briefly.

"No, he won't!" put in a boyish voice. "That's no Dago's pony, I know. It's Marquita, from Bar Cross Ranch; and you'd better look sharp after her, for she is worth more than your whole bunch. I don't know what sort of a fool left her tied up here."

"I did," said Billy, turning eagerly to the speaker, a sharp-eyed, freckled-faced boy, about his own age. "She is mine. I'm Billy Dayton, from Bar Cross Ranch."

"You are!" gasped Cub Connors (for it was that brisk and knowing young person who, after a breezy visit to Las Rocas, was about to reclaim his own "kicker" for a return home). "The kid brother I've heard about? Gee whillikins! who dressed you up in that monkey rig and brought you here?"

Billy passed over the slur on Tio José's

holiday garb, and explained his presence at Las Rocas. As Cub listened, the incredulous stare on his face vanished into a broad grin.

"Golly!" he said. "Well, you are—I won't say what. And you sold old Martina's rugs? Who's got the money?"

"Pedro," answered Billy; "and I don't know where he is. I've lost him in the crowd."

"What! money and all?" exclaimed Cub. "How long ago?"

"Oh, it must have been more than an hour!" was the doleful answer. "We went to look at the snake-charmer, and that made me sort of sick, and we got pushed apart in the crowd. I've been searching for him everywhere, and I can't find my way home alone."

"Golly! no," answered Cub. "Don't think of trying. You couldn't keep that trail after dark even if you knew the way. And as for your boy, you're not likely to see him either. Like as not some sharper has made him dead drunk on pulque and skinned him clean. Well, to think of a candy kid like you being turned loose in a 'jamboree' of this kind! The

best thing you can do is to mount Marquita right off and ride home with me. It's a safe road and five miles shorter. Rooker's Station, you know."

"Oh, I've heard of Rooker's!" replied Billy.

"I bet you have!" said Cub, proudly. "We ain't any more than ten years old, but we're jumpers, I tell you! Killed Buckston and Beryl stone dead already; and we're getting livelier at Rooker's every minute. Store, post office, blacksmith's shop, Connors' Hotel in full blast now. Bids out for a church and a schoolhouse next spring. Telephone and telegraph,—Rooker's is booming with the biggest kind of a boom. You'd better sell Marquita and buy a corner lot. I've got two," confided Cub. "Made the money carrying telegrams for folks like yours, that can't wait for the mails. They kept the wires hot about you, sure; and they'd want you out of this bunch, I know; so you better give up that greaser of yours and come home with me."

It really seemed the only thing for Billy to do; and, with the darkening mountains frowning about him, Rooker's, with

its hotel and post office, sounded invitingly safe and sheltered; so in a few moments both boys had mounted their ponies and were on their way.

"All right, are you?" called a cheery voice, and Billy recognized his big friend of the Snake-Charmer's Cave striding by. "I've had about enough of this too, sonny. There's plenty worse creatures than snakes loose around here, so I'm off."

Billy waved the speaker a friendly good-bye and rode on, glad to leave the sights and sounds of Las Rocas behind him.

"A deal worse than snakes!" growled honest Davy to himself. "Don't know what I came for, anyhow. The rest of the bunch can do what they like, but I'm off to the Jig Saw right now."

"Not till you pay up!" said a sharp young voice beside him.

"Bobby!" said Dave. "Blamed if I didn't come nigh forgetting the little imp! Jump on your pony right quick, for I'm going to take you home."

"Not much!" answered Bob, his black eyes dancing wickedly. "Pan out your cash, Dave. I've won."

"Won what?" asked Davy, staring.

"Oh, you can't go that game on me!" said Bobby. "You know very well what, Davy Drum. I've won fifty dollars, and you said you would double the money if I got it. Here it is." And Bob flaunted five ten dollar notes under Davy's astonished eyes.

"You scoundrel!" cried the big miner, wrathfully. "You've been up to some devil's trick. I'll wager my head!"

"Pooh, no!" laughed Bob, in wicked glee. "It was dead easy, Davy,—easiest thing you ever saw. Found a young fool of a greaser loaded with money, who thought he knew how to play cards. As if I hadn't been watching the Monte men ever since I was born! I played the sucker and let him win everything I had, and muddle himself good with pulque; then I came down on him and cleaned him out. Got a pocketful of loose change besides, after paying treat."

"Where's the greaser?" asked Davy, breathlessly. "He'll be after you with a knife, boy; and it will serve you right."

"Where is he?" mocked Bob. "Asleep up there on the rocks. I've looked after

him all right. He won't know his head from a hole in the ground until sundown, and then I'll be gone. I've just stopped to collect from you, Davy; so cash out your fifty. You ain't the kind to go back on your word.

"No, I ain't," said Davy, slowly,—
"not even when it's about the biggest fool word I ever spoke; and there'll be a pair of fools when you get the money, I know. There it is!" The speaker drew out a roughly-made wallet and dropped five golden eagles into Bobby's outstretched hand. "If you were any other kind of a boy, Bob Bryce, I'd talk to you—no sky-pilot preaching, but plain, straight horse sense; but it's no use."

"Not a bit!" scoffed Bob, as he pocketed the money. "Don't waste your breath, Davy. You'll want it all to explain to Dad that I'm off for good and all, and he needn't try to look me up; for I've got the ready money to make my own way. He was pulling up a little too tight when he planned guardhouse and hard-tack for me. So bye-bye, Davy!" the mocking voice rang out, as Bobby vanished in the crowd.

Davy made a stride forward, as if he would lay hands on his tormentor; but a second thought restrained him.

"What's the good?" he muttered, as he replaced his sadly depleted wallet in his pocket. "What's the good of bothering with a boy like Bob Bryce? Now, that other little chap this evening set me to thinking of mother and home and all sorts of soft things. I'd held him from trouble with a death-grip, he is so young and green. But Bob Bryce is hard and cold as nails, so let him go."

.
Meantime, guided by sharp-eyed Cub, Billy-Boy was taking his way over the broader and safer trail that led to Rook-er's, where his companion had assured him of hospitable welcome for the night.

"Your brother with his bunch stopped there last week," confided Cub, as Kicker and Marquita took a level stretch side by side.

"Oh, did he?" exclaimed Billy, with eager interest in all that pertained to Jack.

"And they were going it rapid, you bet!" continued Cub. "When that Sandy Nick fastens himself upon a chap he never

lets go,—sticks like a horse-leech until he has sucked his last cent. Maybe Bar Cross can stand it; but Dad says, to his notion, your brother was looking mighty sick."

"Was he?" broke in Billy, on whom Cub Connors' figurative border speech was altogether lost. "Oh, poor, dear old Jack! I wish he would stay home and take care of himself until he gets real well again. It would break mother's heart if she knew that Jack is working himself to death out here."

"Working—working himself to death?" echoed Cub, staring at the anxious Billy. "You don't mean to say that—"

Cub paused, with the keen, cutting truth on the very tip of his tongue. What held it back he couldn't have explained; but something in Billy's brown eyes made him feel as if he held the edge of a knife to the throat of a white-wooled lamb. He caught back the words that would have told Billy the "wild West's" opinion of Rackety Jack, and burst into a laugh that made the heights about him ring.

"Well, you're a funny boy!" said Billy, half indignantly. "I don't see any joke in my brother's being ill."

“Nor I,” replied Cub, suddenly sobering, as he raised himself in his stirrups and glanced around him. “But I tell you what I do see, and that’s the biggest kind of a storm coming over that peak there. Steady behind me now. We’ll have to clip it; for we’ll be blown off this trail like two mosquitoes if we don’t get somewhere before that black cloud rising up yonder bursts.”

XV.—ON WILD CAT LEDGE.

YES, indeed, a storm was coming on. Even as Cub spoke, Billy could see that the sunset gold had darkened into a sullen coppery red, and a long streak of ragged cloud was waving like a black flag over the mountaintop. The evening breeze had fled, moaning and sobbing, into the hollows; and flocks of birds were skimming by to the shelter of the pines.

"Come along!" repeated Cub, jerking Marquita's bridle. "It's touch-and-go with us now to make the open road before that storm busts. We've got Wild Cat Ledge before us yet,—the wust stretch of this trail. After me now, quick as you can!"

Neither Billy nor Marquita needed a second bidding. Perhaps Marquita, even more than her rider, knew the perils of that trail in a mountain storm; for every muscle under her silken skin seemed to quiver as she strained swiftly up the mountain height that began to rise steeper

and rougher before them; while to the right the cliff broke away in a succession of narrow jagged ridges until it went suddenly down, down, down, to a little stream brawling noisily far below.

"This here's Wild Cat Ledge," said Cub. "Steady now, and we'll get over all right before the storm busts—halloo! What's that?"

Both boys paused instinctively, though wise Marquita gave a low, impatient whinny as Billy pulled her rein.

"Help!" came a wailing cry from the rocks to the right. "Oh, help, help up there, whoever you are! For God's sake help, help!"

Billy's young face paled under its new coat of tan. It was the first cry of human agony that had ever reached his ear.

"There is somebody over there hurt," he said breathlessly.

Cub edged Kicker to the side of the trail, and peered cautiously over; but a sudden crash of thunder made horse and rider recoil.

"It's—it's a boy!" said Cub, his voice a bit shaken. "He's caught there on the ledge somehow,—toppled over, I guess.

He's killed, or next thing to it. We can't do nothin' for him. Come on!"

"Oh, but he's crying—calling for us to help him!" said Billy, tremulously. "We can't leave him here alone."

"We can't do nothin' else, I tell you," replied Cub, roughly. "His neck or back's broken, and he's done for. I ain't for stayin' here to die with him, if you are. The storm is on us. Don't you hear that?"

There was another opening crash from the blackness, that by this time had widened and risen into great, frowning battlements, flashing here and there with prisoned fire.

Billy had always pooh-poohed Dolly's terror of storms, and frisked fearlessly out on the porch, while she shut herself in a tight-closed room and lit a blessed candle. But Billy had never seen a storm coming on like this. Even the mountain seemed to shudder, as the darkness deepened over cliff and peak, and the wakening roar of a thousand batteries echoed through the gorges. But through it all came the wild, piercing cry of despair:

"Don't—don't go away and leave me here to die! Give me a lift. I can't hold

on much longer. One little lift for God's sake!"

"My, I can't stand that!" And Billy leaped from the quivering Marquita.

"You blamed little fool!" cried Cub, as he grasped the loosened rein. "What are you goin' to do?"

"Help that fellow down there somehow," answered Billy.

"And kill yourself!" shouted Cub over the crash of the thunder,—*"kill yourself, you—you young numskull! What's that strange boy to you,—what's he to you, you dunderhead?"*

What indeed? For one moment, with those black depths opening before him, with the roar of the mountain tempest in his ears, with darkness and danger on every side, that old world-wise question staggered Billy. What was the strange boy crying there in agony to him, that he should pause in his own peril to help and save?

"Come on!" shouted Cub, who was desperately holding on to the quivering Marquita's bridle. "Come on, I say, or we'll all be killed together! Come on, or I'll leave you! I won't stay on this con-

founded ledge another minute for you or any other fool-boy born!"

"Help, help! Oh, for God's sake, help!" wailed the piteous voice.

"Are you comin'?" roared Cub, as another thunderclap shook the mountain.

"Are you comin', you dunderhead of a Dayton?"

"No!" panted the dunderhead of a Dayton," his face white but resolute. "I've got to help. He said for 'God's sake.' I've got to try and help him if I can."

The fierce, wicked word that burst from Cub's lips was lost in another crash of thunder, that sent Kicker and his master dashing madly over the stony heights of Wild Cat, the riderless Marquita speeding after them with sure foot and loose bridle, quivering in every dainty limb.

"Help, help! Oh, they're gone, they're gone!" rose the agonizing cry from the rocks below. "They have gone and left me here to die!" Then followed an outburst of raging curses dreadful to hear.

"Stop that!" shouted Billy, shocked and indignant at such unbecoming language in a death hour. "That's a nice

way for a fellow in your fix to talk! I haven't left you. I'm coming down to help you right now."

And Billy proceeded to scramble down the twisted vines and roots and jagged rocks, that afforded the precarious foothold of Wild Cat Ledge, to the shelf or ridge some fifteen feet below, where, huddled in a piteous heap perilously near to the jutting edge, lay a moaning figure.

"What!" exclaimed Billy, as he recognized the black eyes, the old lips, the trig tweed suit of his late companion of Las Rocas. "It's you!"

"Yes, yes! I give up!" gasped Bob Bryce, who could not understand that anything but pursuit of his ill-gotten gains had brought Billy in such hot reckless haste to his side. "I'll give it all back to you if you'll help me out of this. I'll give it all back, every cent."

"Give what back?" asked Billy, in bewilderment.

"The money," groaned Bob. "The money I got from your fool Pedro,—the sixty dollars."

"You've got Pedro's sixty dollars?"

"Yes, yes!" The crashing of another

thunderbolt deadened Bob's confession. "It's here—here in my pocket. You can take it all, if you'll help me,—if you'll pull me back. I'm slipping! O Lord, I'm slipping! I've been slipping ever since I fell. My arm's broken and I can't hold on. Pull me back. There's a hole right there behind you, under the rocks. I tried to wriggle to it, but I can't. Pull me there out of the storm—oh—oh!"

A blaze of lightning lit the ledge as Bobby spoke. It showed Billy that there was indeed an opening in the rough wall of rock behind him,—a deep recess or hollow under an overhanging rock,—a wild-cat's den perhaps, thought the young explorer, with a chill striking at his heart. But another piteous wail from Bobby settled matters. Den or no den, they must take shelter there; and, catching hold of Bobby's shoulder, Billy pulled. It was a painful operation, no doubt, but there was neither time nor space for scientific handling. Bob's shrieks and curses rose again in shrill unison with the storm.

"Stop that!" commanded Billy, sternly. "Stop that cursing, or I'll drop you, Bob

Bryce! Don't you know you may be dead in another moment, and then *where* do you think you'll go?"

"Oh, you've killed me,—you've killed me!" howled the luckless Bob, as, with a final desperate tug, Billy hunched him into the sheltering hollow. "You've pulled every bone out of place! Oh—ouch—ouch! Oh—oh!"

"I'm sorry!" said Billy. "I couldn't help hurting. It was a tough pull, I must say. But you're safe now,—that is, if there isn't a wild-cat back here. Keep quiet and maybe the pain will go."

"Oh, no, it won't—it won't! I'm broken all over. I'll never walk,—I'll never stand again. Oh, what did I run away for? Why did I take this awful cut over the mountain? Why did I ride that wild Indian pony over this ledge?" And another volley of wicked words burst from Bobby's trembling lips.

"If you don't stop that right now, I'll leave you," said Billy. "Did your horse throw you down here?"

"Oh, yes, yes!" moaned the despairing boy. "He stumbled over the rocks. I wanted to get to the railroad quick

to-night. I took a short cut the Indian boys showed me. I'm killed; I know I'll never get out of this place alive. Oh, oh, oh!" The last exclamation rose into a piercing shriek as the mountain shook from peak to base with an awful thunder-clap, the black cloud burst into forked fire, the wind leaped forth in mad fury from the gorge, and the storm was upon them in all its terrors.

At that first dreadful outburst Billy-Boy's brave young heart seemed to stand still; the blood of all his sturdy ancestors fairly congealed in his veins; he could not think or feel. Crouching in the hollow of the rock in this dizzy mountain ledge, with the crash and roar of the thunder reverberating on every side, the black cloud flashing and flaming, the wind shrieking madly as it bent and twisted and snapped the shuddering trees, the rain pouring down in blinding floods, Billy-Boy felt his last hour had come.

"Our Father—Hail Mary—Holy Mary!" Though Miss Carmel's rosary was not in Tio José's pocket, the blessed words rose almost unconsciously to Billy's lips, min-

gling strangely with the despairing cries of his companion.

"Don't—don't pray! It frightens me to hear you. Don't—don't! I can't die. I won't,—I won't! I'm afraid! Oh, I daren't die, I've been so awful bad! I'm afraid, I'm afraid."

The crash of a thousand batteries echoed the words; a sheet of flame lit the black depths of the gorge below; but that cry of terror and despair pierced the depths of Billy's heart, rousing the young soul, trained by tender teaching to meet hours like this with faith and trust and love and simple boyish charity.

"You'd better pray too, Bob Bryce. You'd better be sorry for all that badness pretty quick,—swearing and cursing and taking Pedro's money."

"Oh, I'll give it back,—I'll give it back!" wailed Bob. "I'll never cheat any more, if I get out of this. I'll never lie or steal. I'll pray,—I'll pray every night."

"You'd better pray now!" said Billy.

"Now I lay me down to sleep—" began Bob, sobbing.

"That's no good," said Billy. "Say an

act of contrition,—say you're sorry for all your sins; say—"

But a crash that seemed to rend the mountain asunder broke in upon Billy's spiritual ministrations, as a huge mass of rock and earth splintered from the cliff went hurling down into the depths below. In the madness of his terror, Bob tried to spring to his feet; but, with a shriek of agony, he fell back—dead, as Billy thought, when he caught the fainting boy in his trembling arms.

Dead indeed it seemed, as the rigid form slipped from his hold and lay there still and silent, all its despairing outcries hushed. Dead! And with an awful horror numbing his heart, Billy felt he was left on Wild Cat Ledge, facing storm and darkness and death alone.

XVI.—ROOKER'S ROOST.

BONY BEN mounted Boris, and, although the storm was at its height, dashed up to the porch of Rooker's Roost,—a name that, despite all its present proprietor's efforts, still clung to the composite of eating and lodging house, saloon, post office, and general emporium, into which the old road house of the stage-coach period had rapidly evolved.

Ben sprang briskly from his smoking horse, and ordered him a double feed and rub down; and then paused for a moment to shake from his own dripping garments their superfluous rainfall before he ventured into the hospitable shelter of the "Roost," that, with all its newly painted and glazed windows, bright and brand-new lights, seemed flashing back electric defiance at the storm.

"Come in, man," said a full, deep voice; and burly Tom Connors, the landlord, stepped out on the porch to greet the newcomer. "Sure we don't mind a drop or two of cold water in here; and betwixt

you and me" (Mr. Connors lowered his voice to a cautious undertone) "there's some of yer own folks inside that would be none the worse for it."

"My own folks?" repeated Ben, as he stamped the water from his boots. "Who?"

"Who but the boss himself and the bunch he travels with, worse luck for the decent-born gentleman he is! They all came galloping up for shelter about an hour ago; and it's the devil of a night they are going to make of it, with the whiskey and the cards and the singing and blatherskiting, that they've begun already. Sure though it's dollars in me own till, I hate to see it," said burly Tom, shaking his head,— "I hate to see it, on me soul. The lad's father was good to me when I was a bare-legged gossoon minding sheep for him five and twenty years ago. I hate to see John Dayton's son going to the dogs like this. Isn't there no one to stop him?"

"No one," answered Ben, grimly. "Far as I can see, he's got the bit in his teeth and is at the break-neck gallop downhill. And that ain't the worst of it," added Ben, his sunken eyes flashing. "He's got

a carriage load of innocents behind him, that's coming in for the smash-up,—mother and sister and brother that's believing and trusting and looking to him as if he was an angel out of the skies. Laws, ye ought to hear that little kid brother of his talk!"

"And ye've never opened the lad's eyes?" exclaimed honest Tom.

"No," replied Ben. "Every day I think I'll do it, but somehow I can't. The boy is no fool and is bound to catch on to things himself. It ain't up to me to throttle him with the truth, that will choke hard. And they're in for a night, you say?" (he glanced in at the half-open door.) "Who is with him? That blood-sucker Sandy Nick?"

"Aye, Dalton and Bender and that black-eyed sharper they call Chips. I'm thinking between them they'll make a finish of him to-night. They were here last week for a bit, and it was all I could do to hold me tongue between me teeth and not meddle. It didn't take Tom Connors' two eyes to see they were playing hard and fast with the lad,—sending the luck up and down to keep him in

heart, so they could sweep everything at last. He lost a thousand to them if he lost a penny last week. And they say that big Jim Rainey holds a mortgage on Bar Cross Ranch for more than it would bring at a forced sale, and he means to foreclose before the year is out."

"Not on all of it," said Ben, eagerly,—
"not on all. There's two hundred acres no mortgage has touched,—wasn't worth a mortgage, they said," and there was a gleam in the speaker's eye,—
"the Southwest Ridge along the Coyote."

"The Southwest Ridge?" echoed Tom.
"That's what they were all shouting about a bit ago. Rackety Jack was cleaned out of ready cash, so they would play him for the Southwest Ridge!"

"They would, eh,—they would, eh?" a fierce oath burst from Bony Ben's lips.
"Blamed if I don't break in on that there game, if I have to turn my shooting irons on the scoundrels! Blamed if I don't—"

"Easy, man,—easy!" interrupted Tom, laying a soothing hand on Ben's arm.
"Keep your head. I'll not have any bloody murdering in a decent place like I'm making of this. Easy now! Sure what can

ye do? What right have the likes of us to meddle?—Eh, God have mercy on us, what's that?"

Both men recoiled instinctively into the open doorway as, through the roar and blaze and fury of the storm, which in their shelter they had disregarded, there came a crash that shook the house to its foundations and seemed to rend earth and heaven asunder. There was a moment's breathless pause; and then, while the mountains far and near thundered back reverberating echoes, the guests of Rooker's rushed tumultuously out on the porch to see what had happened; among them Rackety Jack and his crowd; the fateful cards still in their trembling hands.

"A thunderbolt—an earthquake—a landslide somewhere!"

And while a score or more suggestions were voiced by the white-faced speakers, a startled cry burst simultaneously from Tom Connors and Bony Ben as Kicker came dashing madly up through the storm, his usually fearless rider crouching in terror in his saddle; while behind him galloped the riderless Marquita, with

arched neck and flying mane, her silken coat white with foam.

With a sudden fear clutching his stout heart, Bony Ben leaped from the porch and caught his pet filly's rein, while Cub fairly rolled from the saddle to his startled father's feet.

"Is it dead or alive ye are, ye villain?" gasped Mr. Connors, picking up the breathless boy.

"I—I don't know!" stammered Cub. "Am I dead or alive, Dad?"

"Sure it's crack-brained he is!" cried the startled father. "What's happened to you, at all, at all?"

"And who—what brought this filly here?" thundered Bony Ben, his eyes a very lightning blaze.

Cub glanced desperately around for a moment before he burst into sobbing speech:

"Oh, I couldn't help it,—I couldn't help it! The little fool wouldn't come!"

"Who—what little fool?" cried Ben, an icy premonition flashing upon him as he looked at Marquita's empty saddle. "You—you don't mean our own kid from Bar Cross?"

"Yes—yes," faltered Cub, all his dash and spirit gone. "It wasn't my fault, I tell you, Ben Morris! I was bringing him home from Las Rocas. I'd have brought him home safe and sound, but there was some fellow hurt bad on the way, and the little fool stopped to help him right in the teeth of this storm."

"Billy—Billy Dayton—at Las Rocas? Billy stopped in this storm? Good heavens, sir!" Ben turned to the young master of Bar Cross, who had come out with his crowd at the startling crash. "Do you know what the boy means? Billy, your little brother, was at Las Rocas,—our own little kid, Billy."

"Billy!" repeated Rackety Jack, turning his bloodshot eyes on the speaker. "Eh, what is it you say, Ben?" Over the flushed, dulled features there broke a waking light. "There's—there's nothing wrong with Billy?"

"Wrong with him,—wrong?" echoed Ben, fiercely. "The kid is out somewhere in this storm! Where did you leave him, boy? Speak quick!"

Cub almost collapsed under the iron grip laid upon his shoulder.

"Wild Cat Ledge," gasped Cub. "Let go of me, Ben Morris! 'Twasn't my fault. I told him I couldn't stay there and get killed too."

"Wild Cat Ledge!" shouted a newcomer, as he sprang from his horse amid the inquiring group. "It was Wild Cat Ledge that went a few minutes ago. Pretty nigh half of it slid down the gorge. Jingo, but it made things shake! Thought I was done for, as I came round the trail; but it missed me by half a mile. Give me a drink, Connors,—quick!"

"And the kid was there,—little kid Billy!" And as Ben stood speechless and shaken his arm was caught in a quick nervous grasp.

"What is it they say?" queried Rackety Jack, hoarse-voiced and sobered now. "Billy-Boy out—lost in this storm! My God, it will be his death!"

"Aye, it will,—it will!" All the fierce pain in Ben's heart found stern voice. "And that death will be at your door and mine and all the fools that left him to stray, blind and innocent and trusting, through a cursed, wicked world like this! Stopping to help a fellow that was down,—

stopping on Wild Cat Ledge in a killing storm to help another fellow that was down! Here!" roared Ben to a passing boy. "Bring out that horse of mine quick! I'm off, Mr. Dayton,—off to the Wild Cat, or what's left of it; off to find the boy, or—or what's left of *him!*"

"I'm with you!" Rackety Jack, white-faced and shaken, broke away from his companions amid a chorus of protest.

"You're drunk, Jack! You're mad! Don't be a fool, Jack! You're throwing your life away, man!" said Sandy Nick, angrily.

"And if I am, a score of lives like mine are not worth that of Billy-Boy!" said Jack, hoarsely. "Stand back, boys! Don't try to stop me! Stand back, Nick! I'm neither drunk nor mad now, whatever I may have been half an hour ago."

"But the Ledge—Wild Cat Ledge is down!" roared Sandy Nick, as he realized his prey was slipping from him at the last moment. "The boy can't be there now. Don't be a madman, Rackety!"

"Stand back, I tell you! I'm dangerous to-night!" cried Jack, wrenching himself

from his friend and comrade's detaining hold, while his face grew ashen with the terror Sandy Nick's words conveyed. "If I had not listened to you, Brett, if I had not neglected the boy entrusted to my love and care,—if I had not been a false, weak, cowardly traitor to all that men should hold dear, Billy would be safe at Bar Cross to-night. Now I go to find him, if it costs me my own wretched life. I go to find him living or dead. Bring me my horse—any horse!" called Jack to the boy who had just led out Boris.

"Here she is, sir!" said Bony Ben. "Here is Marquita herself waiting for you. You couldn't find nothing surer nor safer than this same filly. She's got the sense of a human. Off now, my girl!" cheered Ben, as Jack leaped on Marquita, who had been standing under the projecting roof of the porch. "Back where you came from! Back to your little master, my girl,—back to him,—back!"

Marquita pricked up her ears at the familiar tone, and gave a low, comprehending whinny as she recognized her old friend Boris; and then, with the big bay beside her, galloped off into the storm.

Through blazing lightning and crashing thunder the two riders took their way, heedless of all peril. Jack held the lead, Marquita speeding through the tempest like a winged thing, as her rider, driven by torturing agonies of grief and remorse, urged her on. This was the end, the fitting end, of his wild, wicked, sinful course! This was the judgment he had brought on himself and on all he loved! And Billy—trusting, loving little Billy—the sinless victim!

Memories, such as perhaps are the torture of lost souls, rose in agonizing clearness before the hapless man: Baby Billy toddling bravely at his big brother's side; wee white-frosted Billy, racing and tumbling to his order; Billy in breeches, venturing on all big boy tricks at his command; Billy-Boy, older, swimming, riding, skating, and fighting at his hero's word; trusting, true-hearted Billy, speeding joyfully over a continent to his love and care; honest, love-blinded Billy-Boy, seeing no evil in ruined home and reckless life; happy little Billy-Boy, from whose innocent, unconscious eyes Jack's own lost, ruined youth seemed to look out

again in mute reproach, and from whose clear gaze he had fled.

So fierce was the pain rending the reckless rider's heart that for a moment Bony Ben's warning shout was unheard.

"Look out, sir,—for God's sake look out! The whole Ridge is down!"

It was Marquita, recoiling from the mass of crumbling earth and rock before her, that roused Jack from his torturing thoughts. The fury of the storm was past, its work of destruction done. Like the deadlier storms of human passion, its echoes were dying in broken plaints and murmurs, as if Nature were sobbing over the ruin she had wrought; though the thunder still muttered fitfully, and now and then a pale gleam of lightning flashed from the scattered clouds.

"Wild Cat's gone for sure!" said Ben, in an awe-struck voice. "No wonder the earth and heavens shook! Nothing living could stand against this. Poor little chap! Stopping to help a fellow that was down! He was clean through a little man. That's what he came out here for, he said,—to be made a man. Lord help him—"

"Hush!" said Jack, his senses quickened by agony that even honest-hearted Ben could not know. "Don't you hear something below there, to the right?"

"It's the wind, sir," said Bony Ben, hopelessly,—“the wind down there in the gorge. Nothing living could stand against this, as you see. There must be ten thousand tons of rock and earth in this slide.”

"But to the right there! The cliff stands!" cried Jack.

"And goes straight six hundred feet down. The boy couldn't be there, sir. Don't try it. 'Twill be just throwing away your life. Don't try it! For God's sake think of that mother of yours at home!"

"I am thinking of her and her little boy! My God" (the cry was a prayer of hope and rapture), "some one is calling there below! Billy!" and the brother's voice, in all its old strength and clearness, rang out on the dying wail of the storm. "Billy-Boy! Billy-Boy! Halloo there, Billy-Boy! Billy-Boy!"

"Here!" came the shrill boyish answer from unseen depths. "Down here in a hole in the rocks! Down here!"

"God bless us! It's him, sure enough!" gasped Bony Ben, springing from his saddle. "Leave the horses, sir! We must scramble for it. I'll show you the way. We'll get to the lad somehow. Come on,—come on. Call again, to hearten him up, sir,—call again!"

"Billy-Boy! Billy-Boy!" once more the old home name woke the echoes of the mountain. "We're coming, Billy-Boy! We're coming to you, Billy-Boy!"

And, reckless of all peril, Jack and Ben scrambled over the still shaking rocks and earth, over fallen trees and tangled vines, over all the wreck and ruin of Wild Cat Ledge, to the standing wall of cliff that upbore the terraced ridges that went down in steep, unshaken strength to the gorge below.

"Billy-Boy! Billy-Boy!" he called again.

"Jack! Jack!"

And it was the young athlete of Holmhurst that swung over in the darkness below, leaving Big Ben far behind. It was the Jack of old that reached the dizzy ledge, black now against the clearing sky, and caught to his heart the little figure standing there.

“Jack! Jack!” cried Billy-Boy, as, with a glad little break in his voice, he clasped two trembling arms about his hero’s neck. “Oh, I knew you would come to me! I knew you’d find me somehow! I knew God would send you to me, my own dear, big brother Jack!”

XVII.—THE LIFE TURN.

“A LETTER, Miss!” The rosy-cheeked Irish maid appeared smiling at Miss Carmel’s door. “And I’m thinking from the looks of it, that it’s from that darling little boy beyond, God bless his purty face!”

“Billy!” said Miss Carmel, as she took the letter eagerly from Norah’s hand. “Oh, it *is* from Billy,—the dear, dear boy to write so soon again!” and, dropping Mr. Page Ellis’ American beauties that she had been arranging in a vase, Miss Carmel sank into her rocking-chair, and tore open the very fat envelope that seemed to promise a lengthy communication within. She was not mistaken in her hopes. Three sheets of paper heavily and hastily scribbled claimed her attention. The letter, which was more carefully written than the first one, ran thus:

DEAR MISS CARMEL:—I am writing again, because you are my best friend; and I promised that I would not worry mamma writing about any troubles, so

far away. I will now tell you all that has happened, so you will understand how things are all rong here.

Jack and Bony Ben went away on bisness, and it was very lonesome at Bar Cross; and Pedro, the Mexican boy that I told you about, was going to Las Rocas, a place away off in the mountains, to sell rugs that his grandmother had made, and which are fine as Colonel Woodvilles, and lace that his sisters make, which is beautiful enuff for ladies like you to wear. I went along with Pedro, which was rong I know now, though I did not think so then. Martina, who is Pedro's grandmother, dressed me up in her dead boy's close, all blue and silver, because it would disgrace me she said to go to so fine a place in a gray sweater like mine.

It was a long way, longer than I thought; and the road, an Injun trail that we took, went over mountains and rocks and high places which it makes your head dizzy to cross, and got to Las Rocas at last. It is an Injun town and they have a fair there every year, and it was grate Miss Carmel. It beat any fair I ever saw. There were Injuns and cow-

boys and all sort of men drinking and betting and gambolling. And there were races and cock-fights, and a snake-charmer that made me sick to look at. And there was hot chocolate that you would like I know, and nut cakes that were fine. And we sold old Martina's rugs for 60 dollars. And then we met Bob Bryce, who was running away from his father, though I did not know it then, or I would have looked out for him sharply, you bet.

He got Pedro away from me in the crowd, and played cards with him, and made him drunk and took his money, and left him asleep on the rocks, where I could not find him, and it was getting late. So Cub Connors, another boy who knew Jack, said he would take me home with him. We were crossing a very bad place called Wild Cat Ledge, when we heard some one crying dreadful: "For God's sake help!" He was so hurt he could not move. And Cub said no, we must not stop, for a bad storm was coming and we would all be killed. But I said when people call for God's sake we must help if we can; and so I stopped

and climbed down the rocks to see who was there, and it was Bob Bryce, nearly all his bones broke, and hurt dreadful. I pulled him back in a hole in the rocks, which Bony Ben says was likely a wild-cat's den once; and then the storm caught us.

If Dolly could see a storm like that she would die, I know. It looked as if the end of the world had come sure,—everything roaring and blazing and crashing, and the rocks breaking loose; and then Bob Bryce was so scared he tried to jump up on his broken bones, and fainted, and I thought he was dead and that I was left there to die alone. I felt bad then sure, Miss Carmel, when I began to think I would never see home again or mother or you or Dolly or the dogs, and nobody would know where I was when I blew off the Ledge into the river below. I did feel bad, you bet! I tried to think of all the good things you told us, and that I had not been bad like Bob Bryce, and God would take care of me even in that dreadful blackness. But I don't think any boy could die real happy on Wild Cat Ledge. I just

kept praying, and crying that God and the Blessed Virgin would let Jack know where I was; for Jack would come and save me I knew. And when I was crying and praying loudest, I heard some one calling: "Billy-Boy! Billy-Boy!" I'll never forget how good it sounded,— "Billy - Boy! Billy - Boy!"—through all that dreadful blackness and storm. For it was Jack true indeed. Cub Connors had told him where I was, and he came jumping, swinging over the rocks just like he used to swing and jump at home; and he caught me tight in his arms, and most cried over me he was so glad.

Then Bony Ben came too, and they found Bob Bryce was not real dead, but only fainting; and Ben poured whisky in his mouth and brought him back to life. And we waited a while longer until the moon came up, so we could see, and then Jack climbed up to where Marquita was waiting for him. And Bony Ben lifted Bob Bryce, who could not move himself, on Boris, and we started to a cabin of an old hunter that Ben knew, and we stopped until morning, when Jack and I rode back to Bar Cross Ranch. And

Ben took Bob to Rooker's, and sent for his father to forgive him and take him home.

But by the time we got to Bar Cross Jack's head was aching so he could scarcely see, and he had a high fever and had to go to bed, where he has staid ever since. And he don't know me or anybody, but talks about flushes and antes and jack-pots, and all sorts of queer things I don't understand. But I do understand when he cries out: "Don't let mother know. I'll make all things rite yet. Don't let mother know." And then he calls you in low whispers like he was saying his prayers: "Carmel! Carmel! Carmel!" And he says something about your being lost forever, which is only a dream of course, for you are not lost at all. But I almost cry when I hear him, it sounds so sad. I wish I could tell all this to mamma, but I promised Jack I wouldn't; but if you think she ought to know, you tell her all this yourself, so I can keep my word still true.

Your affectionate friend,

BILLY.

Miss Carmel's sweet face had grown

whiter and whiter as she read on. When she reached the end of Billy's letter she was trembling like a frightened dove. But Billy's mother must know indeed, and Miss Carmel's tender heart ached with redoubled pain as she realized the shock of anguish and fear this knowledge would bring. Miss Carmel herself had guessed for long weary months that things were "rong," as Billy said; she knew that only something very "rong" could have caused Jack to write that brief, desperate letter she had received a year ago, telling her he was unworthy of her love and trust; to forgive and forget him. "Forget him!" The words would have struck a death chill to any heart less warm and true; but Miss Carmel still loved and trusted and prayed for the Jack of old.

Now, however, as she took her way over the brown hills, through the woodland paths that only a few weeks ago were arcades of sunlit green, an icy breath of fear seemed to touch the sweet flowers of hope and love she had kept abloom through all these silent months. The dead leaves that lay in drifts about the

gates of Holmhurst, the bare boughs standing stark and stiff against the grey stone wall, the withered rose vines clinging to the porch,—all added gloom to a picture in which life and love and joy had no place.

And Mrs. Dayton, meeting her at the door, caught the new look on the white strained face.

“Carmel,” she cried, “you have heard something, learned something of my boy—my boys, Billy and Jack! My God, what has happened?”

“Nothing yet, dear Mrs. Dayton.” Miss Carmel tried vainly to steady her faltering voice. “I have just had a long letter from Billy, which I think you should see. Jack is ill, he writes; and—and—”

There was no need to say more. Mrs. Dayton had caught the letter from the speaker’s hand and was scanning it with a mother’s quick comprehension.

“Jack! Jack! Oh, this means that he is ill indeed,—that he is dying! I must go to him,—I must go to my boy! Oh, it is so far he will die without me! My poor boy will die out there alone!”

“No, no!” Miss Carmel’s sweet voice

rang out strong in its returning trust and love, as she gathered the trembling, sobbing mother in her arms. "He will not die alone. I have prayed so long for him. God will hear my prayers, I know. Dear mother, Jack's mother, as I have held you in my heart and love for his sake, let me go with you; for Jack is calling me night and day. Let us go together to help him and save him."

These were dark days at Bar Cross,—the darkest that Billy-Boy had ever known. True, the sun was shining brightly as if it never had been clouded. Coyote Creek, full-fed by the autumn rainfall, was dashing merrily over its rocky bed. Old Martina had her sixty dollars returned to a cent by Bob Bryce, whose father had taken him to a sanitarium, where, done up in a plaster jacket, he was being reformed morally and physically. Pedro had made his way back from Las Rocas, a sadder and wiser boy. Jack's "comrades" had scattered with their winnings, as such false friends and comrades will, leaving their late companion in his sore need, with only Billy-Boy, Bony Ben, and Daddy to help him

in his fight for life. The doctor came and went; but it was a long mountain ride for him every visit, and there was not a nurse, trained or untrained, within a hundred miles at least. But old Martina had hobbled up to the Ranch and taken her place by the "señor's" bedside; and Pancha and Wichita had dropped their lacework and were moving deftly about the sick room, doing her bidding; and Chang made teas and broths that no diet kitchen could excel; while Bony Ben, with an anxious heart, watched night and day over all.

But it was Daddy who took command of the darkened chamber in which the master of Bar Cross lay burning in the deadly grip of a brain fever that nothing could break. It was Daddy who knew strange secrets of soothing and healing, learned in Nature's own book. It was Daddy who, strong in the wisdom gained in forest and plain and mountain, would not give up even when the doctor abandoned hope.

"It's all up I fear," said that gentleman. "He can't pull through with a temperature like that."

"Don't know nothing about *temper*," said Daddy, grimly; "but I'll hold on while there's breath. Do you throw up your hands?"

"Yes," replied the doctor. "I can do nothing more."

"Then stand back and don't meddle," said Daddy. "I'll pull him through."

And, with Martina as an able second, the old man began to "pull." It was heavy pulling; but both Daddy and old Martina had already waded far out into the River of Death, and did not fear its chill. They held on stoutly; though Jack's talking and whispering had stopped, and for two days he had lain weak and silent, only the burning fever flush on his face, the quick, short breathing, the fluttering pulse telling that he still lived.

"Done for, I'm afeard, sonny!" said Bony Ben gravely, as one chill evening he and Billy turned from the sick room. "Just naturally burned out. Don't you folks have a priest or a Padre come and do something for chaps in a fix like this?"

"Oh, yes, yes!" said Billy, with a sob in his throat. "If—if Jack is dying he

ought to have a priest, but there is none out here."

"Yes, there is," said Ben. "There's an old missionary been preaching and praying at that lunger's camp across the mountain. I'll send Dick for him right away."

And Dick went galloping over the hills to the "lunger's camp," and returned with the nice white-haired missionary who had travelled in the Pullman with Billy. But, though Father Francis brought the blessings of holy prayer and sacramental unction to the sick man, Jack lay dull and unconscious of the sacred rites, unaware of the priestly presence.

"Give me a place to sleep and I will wait," said Father Francis. "Often there comes light at the last,—beautiful light. We must only pray and wait, my little son, pray and wait."

"What's the chances?" asked Bony Ben, as he and Daddy went out into the deepening twilight.

"Bad!" said Daddy, hopeless for the first time. "If something could rouse him, stir his dull heartstrings, he might take the life turn yet. But looks now as if he were done for, sure."

And so indeed it seemed, as the night came on and the chill darkness settled around Bar Cross. Father Francis had gone to the little room assigned to him. Bony Ben was on guard below. Old Martina nodded in her dusky corner. Daddy kept his steady watch by the pillow, now and then wetting the linen bandage around the patient's head, moistening the parched lips with the fever draught he brewed every morning from herbs and roots of his own gathering. He was 'pulling' still, though against all hope; for the wrecked young life seemed sinking fast. A grey mist was gathering on the wasted face; the pulse was very low. Billy-Boy was kneeling by the bedside, praying as Father Francis had told him,—praying as he had never prayed before in all his young life. He had early imbibed a tender devotion to the Blessed Virgin, and his golden "Hail Marys" could not fail now to win her protection and her love.

"Come, sonny, — come!" Daddy laid his shaking hand on the boy's shoulder. "Go to bed. There's no sort of use for you to stay here."

"Oh, I must,—I must!" said Billy, brokenly. "I can't leave Jack now. There's no one but me. If mamma were here, or—or somebody that loved him. O God save him,—save my own dear, dear, good, grand brother. Holy Mother, bless him and cure him!"

Billy buried his face on the pillow and whispered passionate pleadings from the very depths of his innocent heart, heedless of all the world beyond the death chamber; deaf to the strange sounds and murmuring voices and coming footfalls on hall and stair below, until suddenly the door of the darkened room opened, and Bony Ben ushered in . . .

Billy looked up and started to his feet, thinking surely he was dreaming.

"Mamma! Miss Carmel!" he cried, forgetting for the moment all grief and fear and pain as he recognized the dear familiar figures.

"Carmel!" The last clear, glad cry seemed to pierce the mists and depths into which Jack was sinking. "Carmel!" The dimming eyes opened, the parched lips echoed the word: "Carmel! Carmel!"

"Lord!" cried Daddy, starting to his

feet as he caught the gasping whisper. "It's the life turn! Hold on to him, lady! Grip his hand! Speak to him brave and clear! It's the life or death to him now! Hold on to him while you can!"

"Carmel! Mother! Carmel!" and, as soft, warm hands clasped his icy fingers, as the music of dear-loved voices reached the dull ear, as his mother's kiss fell upon the death damps on his brow, Jack's glazing eyes kindled into wondering light and love. Billy-Boy's prayers were heard. Jack had made the "life turn."

XVIII.—OUR HAPPY HERO GETS A NEW NAME.

ALTHOUGH Jack had taken the "life turn," as Daddy said, it was painfully slow pulling back to the safe harbor of Health. The long, anxious days stretched into weeks, and he still lay white and weak and restless,—the mere wreck of the strong, splendid Jack who had left fair Holmhurst three years before. For thought and conscience awakened with returning life; and even the presence of the dear ones ministering so lovingly to him, brought tortures of remorse as, little by little, the remembrance of his wild, reckless career returned to the sick man, and he realized the ruin he had wrought. He had lost all that his gentle mother had entrusted to his keeping; all that would have entitled him to ask Miss Carmel, whom he had loved so long, to be his wife; all that might have made life bright and beautiful and blessed.

But for Billy-Boy, unconscious of any threatening evil, these were halcyon days

at Bar Cross Ranch. The coming of mamma and Miss Carmel had roused all the Western and Eastern chivalry that lay dormant there, and the Ranch tried to do fitting honor to its fair guests, while Bony Ben fought off the impending ruin that he knew he could not altogether avert.

"It's bound to come," he confided to Daddy, who still kept professional watch on his patient. "I can't stave things off much longer. Land and money and credit and everything gone, except that stretch of rock and sand, the Southwest Ridge. Those sharpers of Brett's were round yesterday offering fifteen hundred dollars for it. Gone back on their first price, as such sharpers will when they know a fellow is down and out. But sonny has got the maps from home that show the Curado lead striking right through that Ridge; and if we can hold on a while all may go right. But blamed if I ain't purty nigh down to the last dollar!"

"And *he* knows it," said Daddy, with a grim nod to the sick man's window. "That's what's keeping him down like a

stone weight, that all those sweet ladies' love can't lift, try as they may."

But some one besides the "sweet ladies" happened to be at work even as Daddy spoke. It was a pleasant November morning, and Billy-Boy had made an early start for the banks of the Coyote to fish. As he drew out his hook and line he noticed a tall stranger leaning against a tree watching him.

"Think you can catch anything?" asked the big man, good-humoredly.

"I'm going to try, sir," answered Billy. "Last week I caught a Friday dinner."

"So you're a Friday fish man?" laughed the other. "So am I. Seems to me I've seen you somewhere before, haven't I?"

"Why, yes, sir!" said Billy, staring up in the keen strong face. "You're the gentleman I met when I was coming out here. I've got your name in my pocket."

"My name," echoed the stranger,—"in your pocket?"

"Yes," replied Billy, diving into that receptacle and bringing out the usual boyish collection of strings and stones and pencils and pennies. "Here it is!" And he produced the torn envelope signed

James J. Rainey, Grizzly Gulch, Wyoming. "You said, sir, I might want a friend away out here, and if I did to call on you."

"I don't remember," said the stranger, with another laugh. "But that is my note of hand sure, and I'm ready to stand by it whenever you want me."

"Oh, I don't want anything now, thank you!" said Billy pleasantly, as he baited a hook. "Jack is getting well and mother and Miss Carmel are at Bar Cross, and everything is hunky-dory again."

"Jack—Bar Cross! Thunderation!" exclaimed the stranger. "I do remember now! You're the little Dayton kid that told me about his grandfather, and—and—by George!" the speaker burst into an odd laugh as his keen eyes rested on the rosy young fisherman busy with his hook and line. "So everything is 'hunky-dory' with you and—your brother, eh?"

"Fine!" answered Billy. "He has been very sick,—came near dying. You see I got left on the mountain in the storm on Wild Cat Ledge. There was a boy hurt very bad there, and I had to help him."

"Do you mean that you were the boy

that stood by that young devil, Bob Bryce, and came very near being killed with him?" asked Mr. Rainey, excitedly.

"Yes, sir," answered Billy, simply. "And Jack came after me, but he was so frightened and worried about me that it made him very sick. He wasn't well when I came here: he had the malaria dreadful, and looked so yellow and hollow-eyed I scarcely knew him. Then he had been working hard, too. You see he had to work hard for mother and Dolly and me; for there was no one else to manage things. And it takes a lot of money to run a big ranch like Bar Cross. I suppose it was all these things together, and then my getting left on Wild Cat Ledge, that brought on the brain fever. My, Jack had it bad! I thought he was going to die, sure. He didn't know me or anybody. He didn't even know Father Francis was giving him Extreme Unction—"

"Father Francis?" interrupted Mr. Jim Rainey. "You had him? If anybody can break the devil's grip, it's that same old priest. He hauled me out of Old Nick's claws half a dozen years ago. And so

your brother has had a close shave of it! Who pulled him through?"

"Hard praying," answered Billy, simply. "Daddy says it was just hard praying and nothing else; for he had touched the life line and was going over. Then mamma got here and Miss Carmel, and that roused him."

"Oh, it did?" said Mr. Rainey, who seemed to find Billy's story most interesting. "And who is Miss Carmel?"

"My Sunday-school teacher," said Billy, "and just the prettiest, sweetest, nicest lady in the world. Jack kept calling her all the time when he did not know anybody else. You see they have been friends ever since they were little boy and girl, and he knew how good she was. I guess he felt if anybody could help him into heaven, it would be Miss Carmel. I wrote her all about it. I had promised Jack not to tell mamma anything that would worry her, so I wrote Miss Carmel—there she is now!" added Billy.

And Mr. Rainey was forced to confess to himself that his young friend's description of his Sunday-school teacher did scant justice to the slender, graceful figure hurrying down the slope.

"Billy," she began eagerly, heedless of the big man who had hastily snatched off his hat in the fair presence,—“O Billy, there are two men putting up a red flag at the gate,—an auction flag, Billy! Run and ask them what it means. Oh, I hope there is some mistake—”

"There is, Miss," interposed Mr. Rainey quickly,—“there is! I'll see to it at once. I have — well — a little claim on some grounds in this neighborhood; but my men are on the wrong track, as I have learned from sonny here,—altogether on the wrong track. I am sincerely sorry if you have been annoyed by any intruder. I will have the flag removed immediately.”

“Oh” (Miss Carmel's soft eyes were lifted in grateful relief to the stranger's), “if you please at once! Jack—Mr. Dayton is to be wheeled to the window to-day, and if he should see it—see any sign of a sale—” the sweet voice faltered.

“He shall *not* see it, I promise you, Miss,” interposed Mr. Rainey. “I'll have the thing pulled down at once. And if you have a foreman or manager, or anybody of that sort about the place, I'd like a few minutes' talk with him on business—

important business,—business that will make any red flag, present or future, quite unnecessary and impossible. Maybe you will introduce me to this young lady, sonny?”

Billy drew the paper from his pocket, to be quite sure he was correct before he said:

“Mr. James J. Rainey, of—of Grizzly Gulch,—Miss Carmel.”

“Mr. James J. Rainey?” echoed Miss Carmel, who had heard of the multimillionaire even in her Eastern home.

“Just big Jim Rainey at your service, Miss. I’ve heard that Bar Cross is a little strapped just now. It happens to the best of us sometimes. I met sonny on the cars coming out, and we had a friendly talk together. He told me a good deal of family history—away back to his grandfather and great-grandfather. Grandfathers, to say nothing of great-grandfathers, being rather uncommon on this side of the Great Divide” (Mr. Rainey’s shrewd eyes twinkled), “I took him to be rather an uncommon boy; and, thinking he might need a friend out here—”

“You have come to help—to befriend

him" (Miss Carmel's face flashed into glad comprehension),—"to—to save Bar Cross Ranch."

"No, Miss," was the honest rejoinder. "I came, I must confess, to sell it. That lurid banner at your gates was mine; but I found sonny with my note of hand in his pocket, and big Jim Rainey has never gone back on his word or note, and never will. So I stand ready to honor Master Billy Dayton's demand for any reasonable amount that he or Bar Cross Ranch may need just now."

"Whoop-hurrah!" shouted Billy, who, quite unconscious that he was saving the family future, was watching his rod and line. "I've got him — yes, and he's a buster!" added the young fisherman jubilantly, as he hauled in a fluttering prize. "Won't Jack open his eyes when he sees what I am bringing home to-day? He said it was too late for any luck."

"That is where he was mistaken," observed Mr. Rainey. "It's never too late for luck, you can tell your brother for me, sonny,—never too late for luck with a chap like you."

And so indeed it proved; for, after a

"few minutes' business talk" with Bony Ben, and an inspection of the "geography game" which Dolly had put in mamma's trunk, Mr. James Rainey found that his generous offer of help promised to be a most profitable venture for all concerned. Abundant means were placed at Bony Ben's immediate disposal; all debts and obligations were paid off; and, relieved of the weight of remorse and despair that was crushing his young life, Jack speedily regained health and strength; and by Christmas, when mamma and Miss Carmel returned home, he was quite the Jack of old again.

Bar Cross Ranch was a busy place that winter, though there was no drinking or "gambolling"; no Sandy Nick or black-eyed Chip to play friends and comrades; no reckless nights or "mornings after" for the young master. Mining experts, surveyors, assayers, men wise in old Dame Nature's secret ways, came and went; old maps were studied, and old charts examined, and old leads explored. And when the spring came, a triumphal telegram went flashing along the lines to Holmhurst:

"Curado lead rediscovered, as per map. New mine, the 'Billy-Boy,' to be opened at once. Will be home in June."

And with the June roses came Jack: a stronger, braver, nobler Jack than the idol of old; a Jack who had gone through the fire and flood of temptation and purification, and had come out redeemed. And with Jack came Billy-Boy, "expanded" beyond Dr. MacVeigh's wildest hopes,—a broad-chested, square-shouldered, ruddy-cheeked Billy-Boy, who could sit a bucking broncho fearlessly, and shoot a wild bird on the wing; a Billy-Boy in heart and mind as well as in every one of his growing inches,—a coming *man*.

And one bright day, when the roses were at their sweetest and best, they were gathered from near and far to deck St. Monica's little altar; and Miss Carmel's Sunday-school turned out, to the smallest tot, in festal array, for the Nuptial Mass of Jack and his lovely bride. All Holmhurst was there, of course—excepting Mr. Page Ellis, who had gone off to Egypt. Dolly was bridesmaid; and Billy-Boy, as he deserved, was "best man."

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Wreathed with climbing roses and clinging vines, Bar Cross Ranch stands among its guarding cottonwoods; its velvet lawns and blooming hedges sloping down to the sparkling waters of the old Coyote, that, guided by skilful ways, carries its fruitful benediction into the thirsting valleys far and near. And like the sunlit waters that have brought bloom and beauty into barren lands is Bar Cross, in the blessed influences that flow from it in ever-widening streams as the happy years go by.

The cheerless, half-ruined old house, on which Billy-Boy looked with doubt and perplexity half a dozen years ago, has spread into a beautiful home, restful and tranquil in spite of the ceaseless activities pulsing beyond its sheltering groves. The "Billy-Boy" Mine is an achieved success; the Southwest Ridge is a hive of busy life; the mining camp is giving way to the mining village; a branch railroad has cut its way down to Buckston, which is once more on the map.

Miss (or "Mrs.") Carmel now has her gentle hands and her loving heart full. To say nothing of the guests that the genial master and amiable mistress gather

in their hospitable home, there is the little log church in the valley, where Father Francis finds his way every other week; and every Sunday the gentle lady of Bar Cross has her queer mixed school of little Pedros and Patsys, Gretchens and Noras. There is the little frame "Infirmary," where she is head nurse in every sudden need. There is the sewing school, where, under her guidance, Pancha and Wichita teach all sorts of dainty handiwork.

And she has her older pupils, too. Under her gentle influence Bony Ben has learned to say with faith and love the Beads of his lost Dolores; and Daddy went down into the valley of the shadow hearing and heeding old Père Jean's call: "Etienne, Etienne! It is growing late. Come home to thy old father, Etienne!" And the rough stone cross on the slopes of the Coyote bears that name alone: "Etienne."

Pedro, who can rattle off English now to match any vendero, is the steadiest of house servants; and old Martina rounded out her years in peace and pride on the wonderful sale of her rugs. Dolly had her

four years in Paris; and Billy-Boy is going triumphantly through a college course, with credit to the mind and muscle tried on Wild Cat Ledge.

Every summer Holmhurst closes its doors, and the whole family, including Miss van Doran, take the wild, free sweep that first tried Billy's wings, over valley and mountain to Bar Cross, where mamma sees life widening into wonderful new interests, and Miss van Doran's malarial cheeks take on a wintry bloom, and pretty Dolly holds the gay court of a Western queen; while Billy-Boy finds his story strangely reversed. He is now the hero—the big boy hero,—whose word is law to the chubby four-year-old that toddles after him in baby lace and trust; only now it is “little Jack” and “Unkey Billy-Boy.”

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